JANUARY 30th ISSUE, 1922
VOL. XXXII No. 6

ADVENTURE

25 Cents

JANUARY
30th
1922
25¢

PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

T. S. Stribling
Raymond S. Spears
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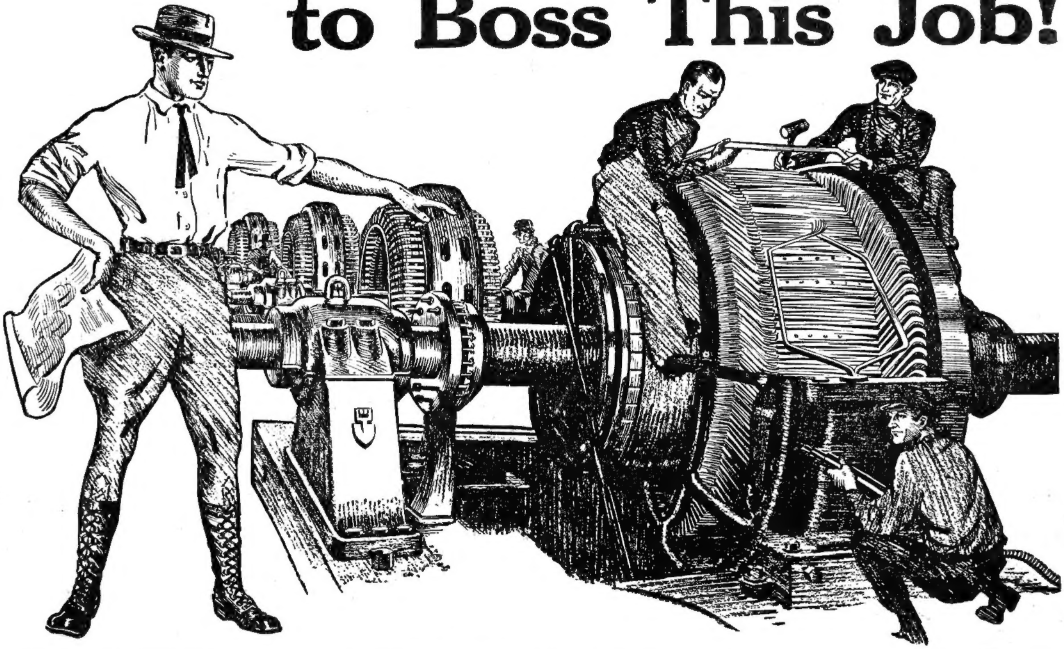
You, Too, Can Learn to Boss This Job!



"ELECTRICAL EXPERTS" Earn $12 to $30 a Day

What's *YOUR* Future?

Trained "Electrical Experts" are in great demand at the highest salaries, and the opportunities for advancement and a big success in this line are the greatest ever known.
"Electrical Experts" earn $70 to $200 a week. Fit yourself for one of these big paying positions.

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Today even the ordinary electrician—the "screw driver" kind is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" ordinary electricians—to boss big jobs—the jobs that pay.

$3,500 to $10,000 a Year

Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs," by enrolling now for my easily-learned, quickly-grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home Study Course in Practical Electricity.

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I Give You a Real Training

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Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, *too*, can get into the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

FREE—Electrical Working Outfit—FREE

I give each student a Splendid Outfit of Electrical Tools, Materials and Measuring Instruments absolutely FREE. I also supply them with Drawing Outfits, examination paper, and many other things that other schools don't furnish. You do PRACTICAL work—AT HOME. You start right in after the first few lessons to WORK AT YOUR PROFESSION in a practical way.

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You can save $45.50 in tuition by enrolling now. Let me send you full particulars of my great Special Offer, and my Free booklet on "How to Become an Electrical Expert."

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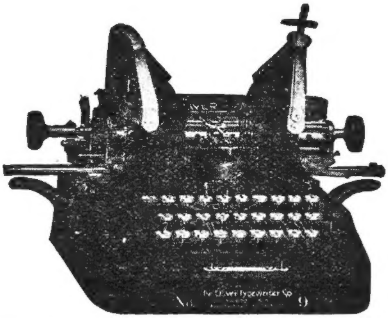
$49.50 NOW

If You Buy Direct From the Factory

Or—Would You Prefer to Pay $100?

Standard $100 Model

Latest Model Oliver 9



FREE TRIAL—Send No Money

We want you to be your own salesman and save the $50.50 that it would cost us to sell you an Oliver.

We'll just ship the Oliver from the Factory direct to your office or home. Keep it for five days. Use it as if it were your own. See if you agree that it is the finest typewriter obtainable, regardless of price.

Easy Terms

Then if you want to buy it, send us $49.50 cash, or if you wish to pay in installments, send us $3 after trial, then $4 per month until $55 is paid. (It costs us $5.50 to carry your account for fourteen months.)

If you decide against it, ship it back at our expense. We even refund the outgoing transportation charges. You do not risk a penny during the trial.

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Save Half!

We'd be compelled to price the Oliver at $100, as we did for over 20 years, if we still maintained an army of traveling salesmen and agents. And if we operated costly branches in over 50 cities.

But now we sell the identical $100 Oliver for half, solely because we deal direct with the buyer and there are no middlemen.

You get for $49.50 what you'd otherwise pay $100 for. Remember, we offer a brand new machine, fresh from the factory, our latest and finest model, the famous No. 9. Over 900,000 Olivers have been sold.

Ask Yourself

"Which for me? $100 or $49.50? Do I care to pay double? Wouldn't I rather be my own salesman and save the $50.50? Then I'll mail the coupon now." It brings EITHER a Free Trial Oliver or Further Information. Check which.

Canadian Price $79

The OLIVER Typewriter Company
731 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY,
731 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay $55 as follows: $3 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of $4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you $49.50. If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is ....

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters —The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name ....

Street Address ....

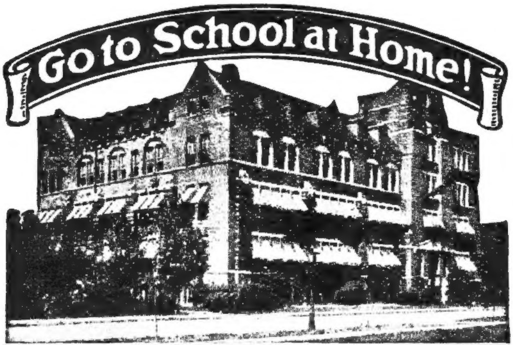
City .... State ....

Occupation or Business ....

ADVENTURE
Jan. 30th, 1922

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25c. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 32
Number 6



High School Course in Two Years!

You Want to Earn Big Money!

And you will not be satisfied unless you earn steady promotion. But are you prepared for the job ahead of you? Do you measure up to the standard that insures success? For a more responsible position a fairly good education is necessary. To write a sensible business letter, to prepare estimates, to figure cost and to compute interest, you must have a certain amount of preparation. All this you must be able to do before you will earn promotion.

Many business houses hire no men whose general knowledge is not equal to a high school course. Why? Because big business refuses to burden itself with men who are barred from promotion by the lack of elementary education.

Can You Qualify for a Better Position

We have a plan whereby you can. We can give you a complete but simplified high school course in two years, giving you all the essentials that form the foundation of practical business. It will prepare you to hold your own where competition is keen and exacting. Do not doubt your ability, but make up your mind to it and you will soon have the requirements that will bring you success and big money. YOU CAN DO IT.

Let us show you how to get on the road to success. It will not cost you a single working hour. We are so sure of being able to help you that we will cheerfully return to you, **at the end of ten lessons, every cent you sent us if you are not absolutely satisfied. What fairer offer can we make you? Write today. It costs you nothing but a stamp.**

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Dept. H-1101, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago

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Explain how I can qualify for position checked:

...**Architect** $5,000 to $15,000
...**Building Contractor** $5,000 to $10,000
...**Automobile Engineer** $4,000 to $10,000
...**Automobile Repairman** $2,500 to $4,000
...**Civil Engineer** $5,000 to $15,000
...**Structural Engineer** $4,000 to $10,000
...**Business Manager** $5,000 to $15,000
...**Certified Public Accountant** $7,000 to $15,000
...**Accountant and Auditor** $2,500 to $7,000
...**Draftsman and Designer** $2,500 to $4,000
...**Electrical Engineer** $4,000 to $10,000
...**General Education** In one year.
...**Lawyer** $5,000 to $15,000
...**Mechanical Engineer** $4,000 to $10,000
...**Shop Superintendent** $3,000 to $7,000
...**Employment Manager** $4,000 to $10,000
...**Steam Engineer** $2,000 to $4,000
...**Foreman's Course** $2,000 to $4,000
...**Sanitary Engineer** $2,000 to $5,000
...**Telephone Engineer** $2,500 to $5,000
...**Telegraph Engineer** $2,500 to $5,000
...**High School Graduate** In two years
..**Fire Insurance Expert** $3,000 to $10,000

Name.................................... **Address**..............................

An Easy Way to Remove Dandruff

If you want plenty of thick, beautiful, glossy, silky hair, do by all means get rid of dandruff, for it will starve your hair and ruin it if you don't.

The best way to get rid of dandruff is to dissolve it. To do this, just apply a little Liquid Arvon at night before retiring; use enough to moisten the scalp, and rub it in gently with the finger tips.

By morning, most, if not all, of your dandruff will be gone, and three or four more applications should completely remove every sign and trace of it.

You will find, too, that all itching of the scalp will stop, and your hair will look and feel a hundred times better. You can get Liquid Arvon at any drug store. A four-ounce bottle is usually all that is needed.

The R. L. Watkins Co., Cleveland, Ohio

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If You Can Tell it from a GENUINE DIAMOND Send it back

To prove our blue-white MEXICAN DIAMOND cannot be told from a GENUINE DIAMOND and has same DAZZLING RAINBOW FIRE, we will send a selected 1 carat gem in ladies Solitaire Ring, (Cat. price $5.26) for **Half Price to Introduce, $2.63,** or in Gents Heavy Tooth Belcher Ring (Cat. Price $6.50) for **$3.25.** Our finest 12k Gold Filled mountings. GUARANTEED 20 YEARS SEND NO MONEY. Just mail postcard or this ad. State Size. We will mail at once. When ring arrives deposit $2.63 for Ladies ring or $3.25 for Gents with postman. If not pleased return in 2 days for money back less handling charges. Write for **Free** catalog. **Agents Wanted.**

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Brooks' Appliance, the modern scientific invention, the wonderful new discovery that relieves rupture, will be sent on trial. No obnoxious springs or pads.

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Has automatic Air Cushions. Binds and draws the broken parts together as you would a broken limb. No salves. No lies. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Protected by U. S. patents. Catalog and measure blanks mailed free. Send name and address today.

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We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Let us send you records and letters from LaSalle students admitted to the bar in various states. Money refunded according to our Guarantee Bond if dissatisfied. Degree of LL.B. conferred. Thousands of successful students enrolled. Low cost, easy terms. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Get our valuable 120-page "Law Guide" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them—NOW.

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Permanent Positions

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You can get one of these good positions if you really want it. All you need is the right kind of preparation. The men and women who get the highest grades in the examinations are practically certain of appointment.

Let the International Correspondence Schools help you to secure a Civil Service position just as they have helped thousands of other ambitious men and women. Here are three typical cases:—

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"When I first took the Civil Service examination for a Government position in Washington, I failed to pass the test, but after carefully studying the I. C. S. Civil Service Course I again took the examination and passed with an excellent rating, receiving my appointment in Washington in less than thirty days after being notified of my grades.

"It was largely on the strength of my knowledge, received from the I. C. S. course, that I passed the Civil Service examination and was appointed to a position in the Government service. I feel a knowledge such as the I. C. S. teaches is needed by all who contemplate passing the Civil Service examinations, and making a success in Government work."

AUBREY B. CARTER,
Secretary to the Comptroller of the Currency, Washington, D. C.

Farmer Becomes Railway Mail Clerk

"When I enrolled for a Civil Service Course with the I. C. S. I was a farmer, and my earnings were very uncertain. Your course made it possible for me not only to pass the competitive examination, but to give a good account of myself by rendering satisfactory service. As a result of the course I became a Railway Mail Clerk, and my salary at this time is $210 a month."

C. J. ADAMS, Selma, Alabama.

Secured Position Quickly

"After taking your Civil Service Course I tried the examination on May 15. I received notice of being a Certified Substitute on July 2, and on July 3 I received my rating from Washington, D. C. On July 7 I was appointed as Clerk in the St. Paul Terminal. I wish to express my gratitude to the I. C. S. for what the course has done for me."

LEONARD W. O. TESSMER,
3328 35th Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minn.

You, too, can do as well. There is not the slightest doubt about it.

Just mark the work you like best in the convenient coupon below and mail it to Scranton. Full information will come to you by return mail—telling how you can prepare for a Civil Service position in your spare time, without losing a day or a dollar from your present work.

— — — — — — — **TEAR OUT HERE** — — — — — — — —

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Without cost or obligation, please send me complete information telling how I can qualify for the Civil Service position before which I have placed an X in the list below:

☐ **STENOGRAPHER-TYPIST**
—prepares students to pass the stenographer-typist examination; also examination for stenographer and that for typist.

☐ **BOOKKEEPER**
—prepares students for the examination for bookkeeper in the departments at Washington, or for bookkeeper in Government offices outside Washington.

☐ **POST-OFFICE**
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☐ **RAILWAY MAIL CLERK**
—prepares students to pass the examination for Railway Mail Clerk.

Name ______________________________

Address ______________________________

$100.00 a Week

He Doubled His Pay

and now enjoys the comforts and pleasures of a real income

Why not double your pay? Thousands of our students have done it and thousands more will do it. You can be one of them. Do not think for a moment that it is luck or pull which brings success and real money—far from it. It is preparing for the big opportunity and knowing what to do when the right time comes that does it. The men who have made successes for themselves were ready when their main chance came. *Your* main chance, too, will come. Are you ready for it?

Remember the Empty Lot?

The older fellows were playing ball and you were watching, wondering if you would ever get a chance to play. You knew if you only got a chance you would show them. Sure enough, one day they hollered, "Come on, kid, grab a bat!" Your chance at the pill had come. That is the way with life Your chance at the pill will come, but, if you want to stay on the team, you will have to deliver the goods—and that you can do only if you are prepared. The big money and the permanent job go to the man "who knows."

You Can be the Man "Who Knows"

We will show you how. Without loss to you of a single working hour, we can show you a sure way to success and big pay. A large number of men in each of the positions listed are enjoying their salaries because of our help. We want to help you. Make a check on the coupon against the job you want and we will help you get it. Write or print your name on the coupon and send it in today.

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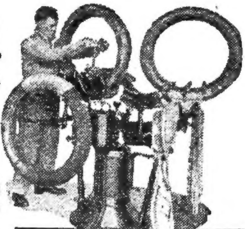
Send me full information on how the **PROMOTION PLAN** will help me win promotion in the job checked.

......Architect
......Building Contractor
......Automobile Engineer
......Automobile Repairman
......Civil Engineer
......Structural Engineer
......Business Manager
......Cert. Public Accountant
......Accountant and Auditor
......Bookkeeper
......Draftsman and Designer
......Electrical Engineer
......Electric Light & Power
......General Education
......Lawyer
......Machine Shop Practice
......Photoplay Writer
......Mechanical Engineer
......Shop Superintendent
......Employment Manager
......Steam Engineer
......Foremanship
......Sanitary Engineer
......Surveyor (& Mapping)
......Telephone Engineer
......Telegraph Engineer
......High School Graduate
......Fire Insurance Expert

Name ....

Address ....



You Can Earn $500 Monthly with this New Machine

Begin right. Make money from very start. **$500** month low estimate. Many earning more. Hargan of Ill. ran **$20,000.00** last year. Fetzer Bros. Pa. made clear profit of **$3,500.00** during first year. Spring City Tire Co. expect 1921 total business to reach **$50,000.00**. Ramsay, N. D. working alone cleared **$441.56** in one month. And so on. It's HAYWOOD'S TIRE SURGERY and this new machine that does the trick. Get into profitable business on sound footing. Learn advanced methods. Old ideas are obsolete. We teach up-to-date systems. Tell you how to do better and faster work. Learn right in your own home or come to my big Indianapolis or branch schools. I go further. **I equip shops complete.** This new, modern machine tremendous money-maker. Has wonderful capacity for rebuilding and repairing casings and tubes. Puts you in position to handle all classes of work. Splendid work it does, quickly builds trade and holds customers. Start like others have done. Tucker, Ill. runs high as **$127.00** weekly single handed. Mitchell, Ill. says: "Record day was **$360.00**". Send coupon for details. I'll forward FREE book by return mail. Tells everything you want to know. Shows how I'll help you to the limit. Send coupon to me personally.

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Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY**

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Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao ....

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"Little Wireless Phones for the Ears" require no medicine but effectively replace what is lacking or defective in the natural ear drums. They are simple devices, which the wearer easily fits into the ears where they are invisible. Soft, safe and comfortable.

Write *today* for our 168-page FREE book on DEAFNESS, giving you full particulars and testimonials.

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Expert Chauffeur $40 a week
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Earn $40 to $150 a Week!

Think of it—over 9,000,000 automobiles are in use in the U. S. There never was a better opportunity for money making than the automobile field offers you right now. Think of the money spent every year to keep all these cars in a going condition. Think of the chances for the repairmen, chauffeurs, engineers and garage owners. Look at the autos being sold—both old and new. Look at the garages springing up here and there. This all means money, money, money for the fellows in the game. Get your share now. Men like you are needed everywhere to fill big paying jobs.

Easy to Learn We have made it easy for you to fit yourself for a job paying from $40.00 to $150.00 a week. You don't have to go to school. You don't have to serve an apprenticeship. Everything is worked out for you by fifteen great automobile engineers so you can become an auto expert in your spare time and keep on earning while you learn.

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First you see the books in your own home or shop. Just mail coupon. You can read them and use them for 7 whole days before you decide. If you like the books, send only $2.80 in 7 days and $3 a month until the special reduced price of $24.80 has been paid. (Regular price $45.) Along with the set goes a year's membership in the American Technical Society including consulting privileges, tests and free employment service. This part of our offer will be withdrawn when the membership is filled.

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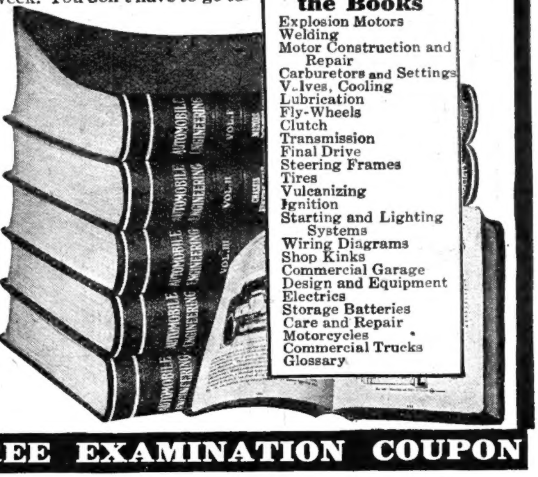
Dept. A-261 **Chicago, Illinois**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- Welding
- Motor Construction and Repair
- Carburetors and Settings
- Valves, Cooling
- Lubrication
- Fly-Wheels
- Clutch
- Transmission
- Final Drive
- Steering Frames
- Tires
- Vulcanizing
- Ignition
- Starting and Lighting Systems
- Wiring Diagrams
- Shop Kinks
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- Motorcycles
- Commercial Trucks
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Send me the 6 volume set of Automobile Engineering books for a week's free trial, by express collect. I will either return the books in one week at your expense or send you $2.80 as first payment and $3.00 every month until a total of $24.80 is paid. With these books I am to receive a free membership in your Society, including Consulting Privileges, Standard Tests and FREE Employment Service.

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Reference..

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Do you want an important, high-salaried position? You can have one if you can do the work. LaSalle experts will show you how, guide you step by step to success and help solve your personal business problems. Our plan enables you to train during spare hours without interference with your present duties. Give us your name and address and mark with an "X" below the kind of position you want to fill. We will mail catalog and full particulars regarding our low cost monthly payment plan. Also our valuable book for ambitious men, "Ten Years' Promotion In One." Tear out, mark and mail the coupon today. No obligation to you. Let us prove to you how this step has helped thousands of ambitious men to real success.

— — — — *Coupon* — — — —

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Ten Years' Promotion In One

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☐ **Business Management:** Training for Official, Managerial, Sales, and Executive positions.
☐ **Higher Accountancy:** Training for positions as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.
☐ **Traffic Management—Foreign and Domestic:** Training for positions as Railroad and Industrial Traffic Manager, etc.
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☐ **Law:** Training for Bar: LL. B. Degree.
☐ **Commercial Law:** Reading, Reference, and Consultation Service for Business Men.
☐ **Industrial Management Efficiency:** Training for Production Managers, Department Heads and all those desiring training in the 48 factors of efficiency.
☐ **Modern Business Correspondence and Practice:** Training for Sales and Collection Correspondents; Sales Promotion Managers; Credit and Office Managers; Correspondence Supervisors, Secretaries, etc.
☐ **Banking and Finance:** Training for executive positions in Banks and Financial Institutions.
☐ **Modern Foremanship and Production Methods:** Training in the direction and handling of industrial forces — for Executives, Managers, Superintendents, Contractors, Foremen, Subforemen, etc.
☐ **Personnel and Employment Management:** Training for Employers, Employment Managers, Executives, Industrial Engineers.
☐ **Business English:** Training for Business Correspondents and Copy Writers.
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☐ **Effective Speaking**
☐ **C. P. A. Coaching for Advanced Accountants**

Name..

Present Position..

Address..

Free Book

Containing complete story of the origin and history of that wonderful instrument—the

SAXOPHONE

Easy to Play Easy to Pay

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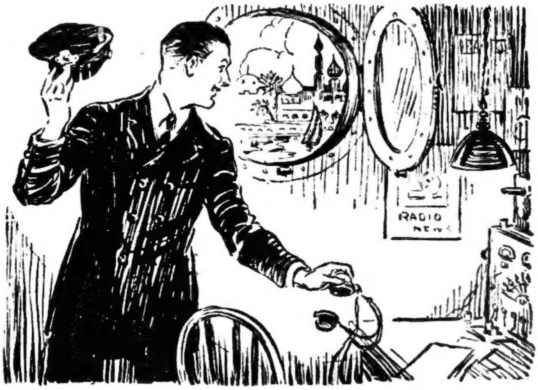

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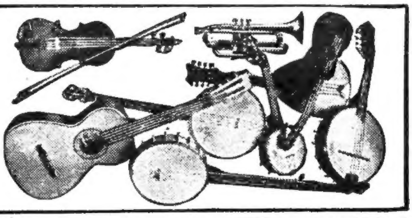

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Headings . . . . **W. C. Brigham, Jr.**

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IN THE darkest days of the American Revolution, with Howe and the British fleet holding New York, Burgoyne smashing through the forests of the northern frontier, and St. Leger and his Indians pouring down the valley of the Mohawk, Washington sends a non-com. of his Army to bring to light the crucial secrets of the enemy's campaign. "THE WHITE DAWN," a novel in four parts, by Hugh Pendexter, begins in the next issue.

THOUGH the luck of *Barthelmy Portuguese* had fallen off, his courage did not fail. He gathered his bullies together and set out over the seas to win gold and ships and try his fortune to the stretching-point. Yet one said that luck must not be forced—and only he knew why. "FORCED LUCK," a complete novelette by J. Allan Dunn, in the next issue.

ACROSS the *veld* South African Police doggedly follow the confusing trail of gun-runners—with an enigma, a maimed and silent native, as a guide. "THE MAN WHO HAD ONLY ONE EAR," a complete novelette by Ferdinand Berthoud, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

**Don't forget the new dates of issue for *Adventure*—
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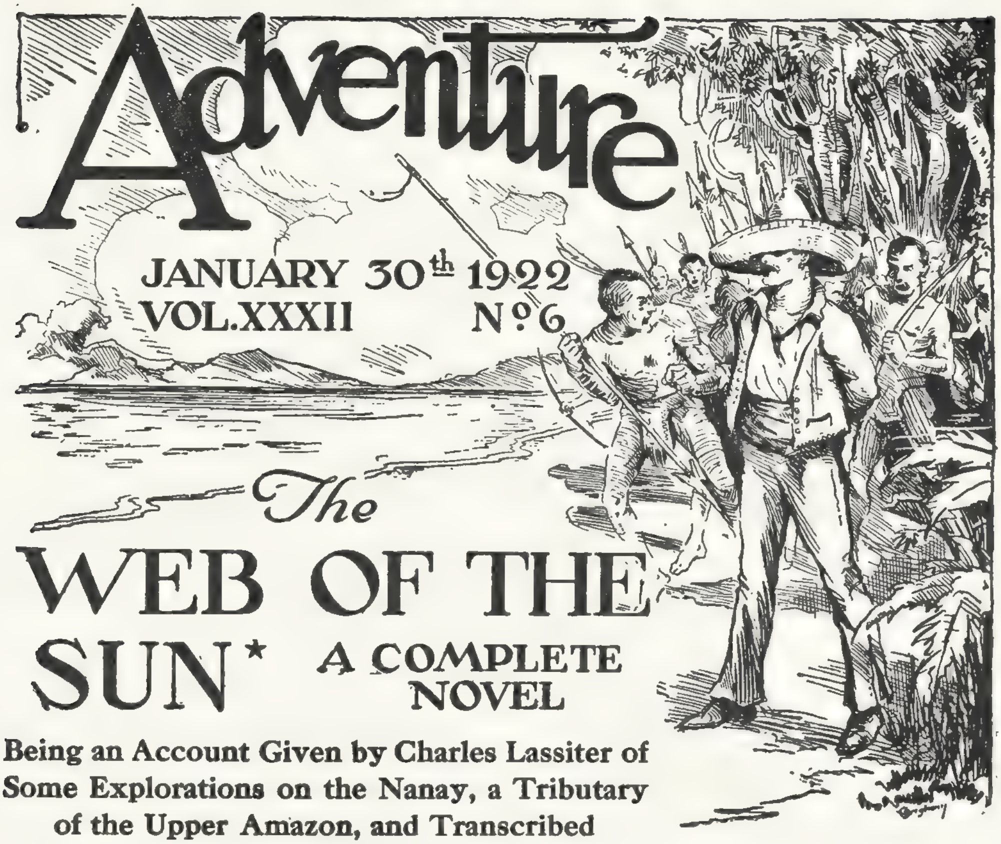

Adventure

JANUARY 30th 1922
VOL.XXXII №6

The WEB OF THE SUN* A COMPLETE NOVEL

Being an Account Given by Charles Lassiter of Some Explorations on the Nanay, a Tributary of the Upper Amazon, and Transcribed

by T. S. Stribling

Author of "The Green Splotches"

EDITOR'S NOTE — During the eleven years of this magazine's life I think we have not once prefaced a story with any statement to the effect that "this is the most remarkable story of the, etc." We do not so announce "The Web of the Sun." Its place in the literature of the day must be determined by the general judgment. To those who wish only a good story of action it will, I think, be fully satisfying. But you will find it much more than that. One critic, whose judgment seems to me personally of first-rank value on such a point, gave as his opinion — with an almost fierce enthusiasm unusual to him—that this story ranks Mr. Stribling with Voltaire and the greatest satirists of all time. I do not feel myself competent to draw such a comparison, but I believe that no thinking man can read this story without finding Mr. Stribling's rapier very deeply inserted in his notions of things in general.

To any who may be distracted from the main point of the story by one phase of one of its factors, finding what seems disparagement of any man's religious belief, let it be pointed out that *Birdsong* emerges with at least as much credit as do the characters who disparage it and him, that the fictitious narrator can not be taken as expressing the author's own opinions, and

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* *"The Web of the Sun," copyright 1921, by T. S. Stribling.*

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that said narrator in the end confesses his own failure to assess correctly the values of men and philosophies. In other words, the story must be judged as a whole, not by any detached part of itself. In the broad sense, the same words the *Century* uses to characterize Mr. Stribling's "Birthright," the negro-problem serial now being featured in that magazine, may be applied also to this other story of his—"without a line of preachment or prejudice."—A. S. H.

Foreword by the Transcriber

I CULTIVATE strangers because it is a tenet of mine that no human being is worth talking to for more than sixty minutes. I go further and hold that it is indiscreet, not to say immoral, to indulge in repeated conversations with any man.

My reasoning on this point is as follows:

Every normal human being desires in his conversation to entertain. When the interesting facts of his life are exhausted (which usually occurs well within the sixty-minute limit) the talker is apt to resort to non-factual material.

However, when two strangers meet, their pasts are to each other virgin fields. It is unnecessary for them to lie. When one does, it is usually because his listener has exhibited listlessness or restlessness and he attempts to supply interest in his narrative by art.

A good listener almost always hears a truthful tale; a bad listener demoralizes the most sincere man. I should say, if there be an after life in which the good and evil of our earthly existences are punished and rewarded, I should say that —— is paved with bad listeners.

I, myself, am, by profession, a skilful listener. When I heard this story in a little Rio Janeiro wine-shop, Charles Lassiter, who told it, was a complete stranger to me. Therefore it had the psychological setting of truth. Likewise, it possessed every internal evidence of verity. Nevertheless, I have always hesitated to publish the account Lassiter gave me of his sojourn in Motobatl in the year 1917, and of his, shall I say, explosion out of that sinister land.

Personally I have never doubted the genuineness of his narrative. His manner, voice, gesture, his changing color and once, his tears, bore the imprint of sincerity. But heretofore, I did not care to hazard my professional standing as a representative of the Associated Press by publishing so strange a relation upon the uncorroborated word of one man.

Fortunately, the appearance of Sir Cecil Hindshaw's new volume, "A Naturalist on the Upper Amazon,"* has furnished exactly the corroboration required.

I say, "fortunately," but really the shoe now pinches the other foot. Sir Cecil's elaborate work not only has allayed all doubt, it has killed all the novelty and all the timeliness of Charles Lassiter's unscientific account. However, the latter is presented herewith, not for its details, which have become trite, but for the human interest it contains, and for a certain dramatic element, which naturally Sir Cecil carefully avoided.

Indeed the dénouement resolves itself so nearly into the form of the more reserved and realistic type of modern fiction, that I have frankly cast the whole narrative into fictional mold, always presupposing, however, a mental attitude in the reader as toward an ordinary fact article.—T. S. S.

WANDERLUST and a touch of poetry led Charles Lassiter into the service of the Stendill Steamship Company of New York, Guayaquil and Rio de Janeiro; an unsuspected business ability kept him there and smothered whatever adventurer lay in the lad.

By the time Lassiter saw the only possibility of romance in the Stendill offices lay among the girl stenographers, the size of his pay check had tethered him to his post. In point of fact, he never did marry a typist, slough his poetry and make another swallow's nest in the cañons of New York. A certain Jack-a-Dreams mood, a shimmer of fancy, always floated between him and the comfortable commonplace of marriage.

The women in the office resented Lassiter's bachelorhood. The sex instinctively looks upon a man as a possible easement of life's roughnesses. The unattached male is at once a criticism upon their collective charms and a slacker. Once a typist snapped out in Lassiter's presence something about "the big stiff spells 'soul' with a dollar mark."

She would have been surprized, and no doubt further irritated, had she known that when the women employes of Stendill filed out into Maiden Lane at four o'clock, Lassiter always leaned out of the window and watched their tiny figures lose themselves in the roaring traffic. There was something vaguely alluring about them, thus vanishing—as seen from a top view, ten stories removed.

DURING this period of his life Lassiter attended evening classes of Spanish, commercial law, the custom differentiations of the various South American countries, because he saw, as every one else saw, that the future of

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*See *A Naturalist on the Upper Amazon*, Hindshaw' Wier & Duffling, 16, Piccadilly Circus, London, 20s. 6d.

American trade centered largely in its own hemisphere. In course of time he became one of the Spanish correspondents in the office. In this position the letters he received from the South Americans, their leisurely rhetoric and ornate courtesy painted sun-shot Utopias before his wistful fancy. Sometimes a sort of despair filled the clerk that mere slips of paper could travel to and from such a favored land while he remained rooted at his desk.

Lassiter had been in the service of the Stendill Company for four and a half years when Henry Stendill, its organizer and first president, died and was succeeded by the present incumbent, M. L. N. Morrow.

This is no place to go into M. L. N. Morrow's extraordinary shipping career. All railway and steamship wiselings, all students of the development of America's sea-borne trade, are familiar with the great impetus the Morrow plan gave the Stendill service, and, by reaction, to every other American ship corporation.

Not to dally over threadbare material—when Morrow took control of the Stendill fleet, those steamers were sailing back from South America in ballast, or at best, half laden. Morrow developed the idea of owning industries to freight his own bottoms. Today the Stendill tri-color floats over copper mines in Bolivia, ivorynut plantations in Peru, cacao forests in Ecuador, rubber camps in Brazil, coffee plantations around São Paulo and packing houses in Buenos Aires.*

In this burst of development, there arose in the Stendill offices a strong demand for Spanish-speaking men to be used in the South American service. Notwithstanding the fact that Lassiter lacked what may be called the belligerency of the usual successful American business man, nevertheless he was tried out, first as traveling auditor, later as traveling business representative of the Stendill lines on the South American West Coast.

It really turned out a fortunate choice. About Lassiter hung a shadow of wistfulness that softened everything he said or did. It ameliorated his American *brusquerie* into something closely akin to the courtesy of the Latins themselves. Chance had tossed Lassiter into his *milieu*. For example, one of the Bustamentes of Santiago in closing a deal to ship government nitrates in Stendill bottoms, remarked with a smile:

"Señor Lassiter, an acquaintance of mine once swore to me there were no gentlemen in America—I am sorry he did not find you at home."

And the South American agent had the aplomb to parry the thrust at his countrymen's *gaucherie* by saying—

"It was unavoidable; at the time I was studying how to avoid provincialism in Santiago." The *riposte* through the cloak of a compliment entirely delighted Bustamente.

Lassiter never forgot his sailing out of New York harbor on his first commission south. The tang of adventure that had landed him in the Stendill offices four and a half years previously, reasserted itself in his blood. It seemed the life was coming to him in his thirty-second year.

He stood on the weather side of his steamer, facing a half gale that beat in from the Atlantic. It seemed to him that the spume and wind blew out of his life the musty years of his office work, his cocoon-period. He was sailing into a new and wine-y dawn.

What he expected that dawn to bring him he could never have formulated. There was a woman in it, certainly. A brunette, since he was a demi-blond and as yet, had not known brunes. A woman fairer than he had ever seen, a bit nebulous, if the truth be told. In the visioning of every bachelor gleams the rondures of a woman real or feigned, just as in the memory of a benedict glows the dalliance of unmarried days. These are the morning and evening stars of a man's life.

To any one at all familiar with South American West Coast traditions, Lassiter's *naïveté* must appear amusing. Lassiter would have no opportunity of knowing the exclusive upper-class Spanish-American families. Lassiter not only did not belong, his work made him impossible. To the South American aristocracy commercialism is tainted. The Latin clings to the medieval idea that wealth should be wrung from the sweat of the unwilling, not from the purse of the unwary; he prefers peonage to commerce. It is more glorious—and less fatiguing. Lassiter was damned before trial and never had his day in court.

Moreover the sort of romance with which

---

*For complete list of Stendill holdings in South America, see "American Penetration of South America": *Marine Review* (N. Y.), August, 1919.

Lassiter titillated his fancy does not obtain south of the equator. The American-Spaniard's idea of romance is marriage and mistresses. It is somewhat akin to the Peruvian shop-keeper's idea of business, where he has three or four prices on every article in his *tienda.*

Spanish-America's slogan seems to be, *Caveat emptor et mulier.*

The whole ensemble lacks a certain high cold wind that blows through the Anglo-Saxon idea of romance.

In time Lassiter learned these things, and the bars of his prison slowly enfolded him again. The West Coast of South America became an extension of the Stendill offices in Maiden Lane.

S M. L. N. MORROW'S greatest feat at the head of the Stendill millions was his organization of the Zeppelin passenger service from Quito to Rio de Janeiro, and the establishment along the Amazon and across the Andes, of a line of hangars, supply depots, and big tourist hotels at favorable locations. At present, it is the world's most ambitious aerial achievement.

In formulating his plans, Morrow called Lassiter from Lima to New York for a conference. The president presented the idea in a block to Lassiter for the South American agent to elaborate it.

It was this:

At that time the transcontinental railway from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso which connected with the Antofagasta line into Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador, held a monopoly on travel across South America. Valparaiso was twenty-six days from New York, by way of Buenos Aires. Morrow's projected line from Rio to Quito would cut this schedule to sixteen days with the advantage of flying over some of the richest tropical scenery in the world. Underneath the traveler would unroll the mysteries of the Amazon, the grandeur of the Andes, and the beauties of ancient Spanish cities. As a tourist attraction, such an aerial tour would be unequaled on the globe. Moreover the price that could be quoted would be almost as low as the longer and more grueling journey by train across the monotonous plain of the Argentine.

Morrow estimated the cost of such a project at from fifteen to eighteen millions. It turned out in fact to be sixteen and three-quarters. When he laid this outline before his subordinate, he impressed upon Lassiter the need of absolute secrecy in the preliminary survey. The Chile-Argentine railroad would not be indifferent to such rivalry. No doubt they would install a duplicate service. Moreover, having a railroad as a base of construction, they could launch their dirigibles before the Americans could get into the air.

"Therefore," pointed out the president, "I would suggest that your preliminary survey be conducted as inconspicuously as possible. Why not be engaged ostensibly upon some other venture, say prospecting for copper, or seeking a soil that will produce this new South American drink, *mate.* Use your judgment about the color of your expedition, select your own personnel, choose your own route, and do it all unobserved."

Lassiter remained in New York upward of three weeks after this consultation, preparing for his journey of exploration. During this period there stuck in his head the problem of an entirely inconspicuous survey.

Here was the difficulty. Lassiter was well known, almost noted, along the West Coast of South America for the many enterprises he had promoted. Latin-American financiers had come to watch him as a commercial weathercock pointing the winds of fortune.

The Latin-American is not a man of action in the American sense. He is deliberate, but highly observing; he is indolent, but full of chicane. He is an extremely difficult man to beguile. Lassiter knew if he launched any sort of expedition into the interior of South America from any point along the coast, half a dozen men in his employ would be agents of the Argentine-Chile railroad.

That formed his problem. The Stendill agent required no ordinary deception. He needed something enigmatic, impenetrable, absolute—there he stuck.

Life has a surprizing way of presenting to the seeker exactly what he is looking for. It seems almost as if mind fashioned matter in its own image as Berkely claims it does. To wish is to possess.

This, of course, is no new truth. It was promulgated two thousand years ago by a certain wise man, whose teachings, unfortunately, have fallen in disrepute with the human race. This seer expressed it—

"Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

THE manner in which Charles Lassiter came to know Ezekiel Birdsong is a case in point.

In New York the South American agent had few acquaintances, because he was in that city only once or twice a year, and in New York an acquaintanceship seldom persists for more than from ten minutes to fourteen or fifteen days. So Lassiter always found himself alone in New York, the city of his birth.

To amuse himself he usually strolled a little after dinner up and down Broadway or Fifth Avenue, watching the dinner parties, the theater-goers, the crowds. To the theaters themselves he did not go because, like most men with a touch of romance in their make-up, the drama is too fore-ordained, its movement too metronomic, its action too logical. When logic comes in at the stage door, romance takes to its wings.

After the hour of dinner and theater movement, Lassiter liked to sit in Bryant Park. This is an impersonal bit of pavement with a few iron benches, and hopeless trees, where of Summer evenings office men, newspaper hacks, lawyers, yeggs, Chinese laundrymen, Jap curio dealers and vaudevillians come out and sit for a while to breathe the air.

The presence of the library gives this park a certain informed atmosphere. Loiterers here are knowing gentlemen who discuss the topics of the earth—bolshevism, the secret treaties suppressed in the *Evening Post*, the Egyptian art of preserving mummies, the vice problem, the best methods of blowing safes, the composition of the varnish on Cremonas, whether Dr. Cook reached the pole.

High against the sky-scrapers flash and fade acres of electric signs advising the midget philosophers below to "Smoke Madelains," "Eat Whateley's Wheat Waffles," "Chop Suey," "Tell Her With Flowers," "Goldstein's Detectives Never Sleep."

Motors and trucks honk; the beetle creeps down an antiquated street car track; the snore of the subway trains rises to a buried thunder; the pavement trembles, the benches quake, the fetor of dust, oil and breathed air floats up out of its manholes. The skyscrapers pulsate heat. The crowds flow past in well-defined drifts.

Bryant Park always appealed to Lassiter as the first movement of some great confused drama that would never know a curtain.

ON THE evening before he was to sail for South America, Lassiter strolled down to Bryant Park and found a seat in this air-hole of the crust of New York. The bench-mate chance dealt to the promoter was a short sturdy man in a black suit, which needed pressing, who wore a felt hat with a brim a trifle wide for Broadway.

He was sunburned, and presently, when he took off the hat on account of the heat, Lassiter noticed he had a suit of jet-black hair oiled down to a piano finish over the left side of his head, while on the right side it was piled up in large, exact, scroll-like curls. It was the coiffure of some rustic Brummell. The man himself had the look of a youth who had ridden his years into hard places.

As Lassiter absorbed these details, his bench-mate turned to him with perfect spontaneity and asked the name of the Bush Terminal Building. His voice had the slurring, nasal twang of an uneducated Southerner. The promoter gave the information with a faint sense of amusement.

The man drew a deep breath, made a move with his hat as if to fan with it, but seemed to apprehend some social mistake and restored it to his glossy head.

"New York may be a way up north," he volunteered, "but it appears about as hot as Arkansas to me."

"Come from Arkansas?"

"Ezekiel Birdsong, from a town of the same name."

He used the phrase with a patness that suggested many repetitions, at the same time he turned and held out a hand to Lassiter.

This seemed to be in the nature of an introduction. The South American agent shook hands, gave his own name, then asked a little uncertainly—

"Do you mean you live in a town named Birdsong?"

"That's right—Birdsong, Yell County, Arkansas. Named after my daddy. He moved us out there from Blue Ridge, Tennessee, Sequatchie County when I was just a shaver. He staked off a claim to a hundred and sixty acres of fine bottom-land and jest naturally squatted on six hundred more. When they come and tried to put him off, glory to God, they'd waited too long and it belonged to the old man."

Mr. Birdsong dropped his phrase of laudation with perfect simplicity and with no trace of irreverence.

The South American agent looked up at the sign which assured him Goldstein's detectives never slept; then after a moment, observed in a casual voice that Arkansas lands had advanced sharply in value.

Mr. Birdsong nodded.

"Yes, God has sure blessed our fam'ly, and I thought I would pay back His many mercies by spreaden the Word."

Out of this sentence, the phrases "many mercies" and "spreaden the Word" each wore the cadence of much use.

The Stendill financial agent looked at his man carefully—

"By—by what?"

"Spreaden the Word," repeated the Arkansan, not realizing the words could involve any obscurity.

"You came to New York to—to—spreaden the Word?" groped Lassiter.

"Oh, no, not in New York. I guess there's plenty of Bibles in New York. I'm going to South America. That's my chosen field." His faint accent on the words "chosen field" told Lassiter this, too, was a favored *cliché*.

The South American agent nodded, still slightly at sea—

"I see—you are going to South America to sell Bibles——"

"Give 'em away," corrected Birdsong.

"To give them away?"

Mr. Birdsong nodded—

"To make my calling and election sure, brother."

Lassiter took a moment in an effort to construe this olio of politics and theology, but after a moment resigned.

"When do you sail?"

"That's just up to the Lord," drawled Mr. Birdsong. "I'm working for Him now."

He spoke as concretely as if he knew the Deity's street address and telephone number.

"I come up here to sail on the *Brazilian* tomorrow. I thought I come up in plenty o' time, but they tell me down at the office all the rooms are sold on the *Brazilian*. Not only that, but all the rooms are sold for the next six months to come. I went down to the *Brazilian* herself to ask and make sure, but down there they said the office men knew more about it than they did.

"Well, after I done all I could, I jest went back to my room and put my case before the Lord. I been wrastlin' with Him all day in prayer; tellin' Him, if it's His will, to lead me to a stateroom on the *Brazilian* somehow. Well, I wrastled all day. About a hour ago, I felt like I got a answer, so I jest let Him direct me, and took a little walk and come out here and set down."

Lassiter stared at the fellow.

"You don't really mean you are sitting here waiting for—for the Omnipotent to send you a berth on the *Brazilian?*"

Birdsong straightened with a faint belligerency—

"Why man, you don't doubt He could, do you?"

Lassiter abandoned the point hastily.

"How are you going to get along in South America—do you speak Spanish?"

"Why, no," admitted the Arkansan simply. "God may send me a Spanish interrupter, or He may cause me to speak in tongues. He's running this shebang, not me."

The conversation was again slipping out of the Stendill agent's grasp. He cast about for another topic and observed that he himself was sailing on the *Brazilian* the next day.

Birdsong sprang up, a sudden light pouring into his sunburned face.

"You are! Well, bless His holy name! I knowed He wouldn't desert me here in New York! Praise the Lord!"

Lassiter held up a protesting hand:

"Hold on! Wait, Mr. Birdsong. I don't want you to build any false hopes—I can't take you——"

"Why, I'll bet you do!" cried Birdsong. "What have we been led together here for? Fount of Mercy!"

"I am not aware of being led, although——"

Lassiter hesitated as the amazingness of the coincidence thrust itself upon him.

"—although it is extraordinary that you should have stumbled upon anybody at all billeted for your steamer. Come to think about it, it's really astounding—six million people in New York; three hundred passengers on the *Brazilian*—six or seven hundred squares in New York where crowds foregather; perhaps fifty of those passengers are out in the squares tonight——"

"Brother Lassiter, what are you doing?" inquired the Arkansan ingenuously.

"I was trying to calculate how many chances out of a billion you had of meeting a passenger on the *Brazilian* when you walked out, took this seat and waited for one to come along."

"My brother," said Birdsong with a warming smile, "don't worry your head about the mysteries of God. I used to try to reason things out tull I jest th'owed myself on His holy promises—ain't you got an extry bed in our room on the *Brazilian*?"

"No."

"Ain't you got no space on the floor where your trunks ain't settin' where I could lay down at nights?"

"Well, yes," admitted Lassiter, "I have a whole suite of rooms, but——"

"Praise God!" ejaculated Birdsong in a conversational tone.

"But hold on," protested Lassiter with an uncomfortable feeling that his moral supports were slipping.

"Sure, I'm holding on," a certain twinkle in his black eyes signaled a sense of humor; "I ain't goin' to let go. The Lord's done His work, and I'll do mine. Now look here, Brother Lassiter, you won't even see me in your sweet rooms. I'll slip in about ten or half past at night—long after you've gone to bed; and I'll yave out by three or four in the morning long before you get up."

The Stendill agent felt himself thawing, a little unwillingly. Then, too, Birdsong's faith appealed to him as a sporting proposition. The man had taken a chance of about one in ten million (he had managed the figures roughly) and was about to win. It gave Lassiter a sort of thrill. It was a bit of genuine romance, a touch of the wildly improbable, a gesture of the lawless gods who make laws, but who disport themselves above laws.

"What are *you* going to do when *you* get down there, Brother Lassiter?" Birdsong's accent included himself in the voyage.

The promoter was amused.

"Why I'm going to——"

Here he stopped. For some reason he did not want to tell Ezekiel Birdsong a lie.

"I hope it ain't nothin' to get you into no trouble," observed the Arkansan simply.

"I think not."

"I've heard of smugglers and gamblers and such like. I hope you ain't none of them. If you've got any secret sin on your heart, Brother Lassiter, you can tell it to me."

Lassiter laughed.

"It's a secret, but not a secret sin; it's a trade secret."

"I'm used to trade secrets," said Birdsong. "My daddy was a moonshiner in Tennessee before he got religion."

"My trade secret is this: I am wondering how it will be possible for me to make a journey across the Andes from Quito and not allow my trade rivals to know what I am doing?"

Birdsong studied a moment.

"Are there any lost sinners on that route, Brother Lassiter?"

"Sinners are not lost in South America, Mr. Birdsong; you can lay your hand on them anywhere."

"Glory to God," observed the colporteur conversationally; "then why couldn't I take the route you want to go, Brother Lassiter, and you could come along as my Spanish interrupter?"

Lassiter looked at the Arkansan as he proposed this exceedingly simple method of gaining complete obscurity. He had never thought of making his explorations in South America in a humble rôle. Like most well-to-do men the thought of leaving his own sphere never occurred to him; yet it was the easiest, most natural device possible.

The colporteur scrutinized Lassiter's face closely, and saw that he had gained.

"You see, Brother Lassiter, the Lord has sent me a berth on the *Brazilian* and a Spanish interrupter all at one whack, bless His holy name!"

His drawl held a genial triumph.

Lassiter's mind came back to the matter in hand, and a certain human duty he owed Birdsong.

"I must warn you, Mr. Birdsong, I am going into an unsettled country."

"That's all right, Brother Lassiter, I come from an unsettled country."

"There may be even danger."

"They tell me the martyrs wear the brightest crowns of anybody in the New Jerusalem, Brother Lassiter. I only hope I'll be considered worthy to die in His cause, bless His holy name!"

"All right, we'll try it." He arose briskly.

"Meet me tomorrow at nine at Pier 19 on the Brooklyn side. We sail at 11:30."

Birdsong extended a brown hand and shook hands on the bargain after the fashion of Arkansas horse traders. Lassiter had an impulse to tell Birdsong how to get to Pier 19, but he did not. Somehow he had an impression, that if Birdsong should walk out and jump on the first car passing, it would be a limited express for Pier 19.

So Lassiter gave no direction, but offered a cigar to the colporteur, which is the New York fashion of sealing a compact. Birdsong looked at the pigskin case curiously, took out a cigar, inhaled its aroma, then put it back.

"No, I put away the filthy weed when I turned to God, Brother Lassiter—" Here he hesitated a moment, then went on resolutely: "Do you think it's right to smoke, brother? Suppose the Lord should call you home, would you like to enter the pearly gates smellin' like a tobacco factory?"

The South American agent pressed his lips together in a sudden quirk and looked up to consult a flare of Goldstein's Detectives who Never Slept. These wide-awake sleuths restored the agent's poise.

"Mr. Birdsong," he queried, "just what perfume do you suppose the Lord would prefer?"

The Arkansan pondered seriously.

"I always imagined lilac—there's a lilac bush growing right in front of our cabin—me and Mollie was married under it."

II

TWENTY-THREE days after the *Brazilian* sailed from New York, Lassiter and Birdsong were in Quito, Ecuador, buying muleteers' outfits for their trans-Andean junket. The Stendill agent bought thoroughly; his purchases extended right down from brightly colored ponchos, high sombreros, wide trousers to the tasseled goad used by the muleteers.

Lassiter believed, no doubt, that he donned the costume purely for the purpose of guarding his identity and his business secret, but the gay clothes flattered the poet and the masquerader wrapped up in the financial agent. He put them on in the back room of the *tienda* where he bought them. When he glanced into a dusty mirror, the image he saw caught and held his eye. It gave him a queer sense of having stumbled, quite unexpectedly, upon that youthful, romantic Charles Lassiter who had entered the Stendill offices in Maiden Lane thirteen years prior. Thirteen years—then he was twenty-six. Now he was thirty-nine——

As he stood and looked into the glass, came that strange realization that his youth, his immortal youth, had slipped from him like a worn garment.

Here Birdsong drawled that they must go to San Francisco Plaza and hire some mules.

As for the colporteur, his yellow and purple poncho, his sombrero with a band of silver lace, his trousers, affected him not at all. The man might have been born a *mulero*. But Lassiter's costume affected him both physically and mentally. The loose freedom of the poncho lifted his spirits; in the wide trousers his legs felt fit for running and jumping.

As he walked along the heavy Spanish streets of Quito, kinship of costume made him realize that the *mestizos* and Indian muleteers he met were human beings like himself—which is a remarkable realization for an upper-middle-class man. He understood their supple swinging walk and the way they carried their goads along their arms. He shifted his to that position.

PLAZA SAN FRANCISCO, the live stock grain market of Quito, is a colorful, noisy place set in the cold brilliance of mountain sunshine. A babble of bastard Spanish, Aymara and Quichua dialects fill the air. The air is rank with the smell of animal ammonia, straw, droppings, mules and burros. Buyers and venders come and go with strings of donkeys, mules and high-necked llamas. Over the plaza are ponchos of every color, greens, yellows, oranges, reds, stripes, checks and fanciful designs. There is much sombrero tipping and courtly address between all men, rich or beggarly. In this land where work is held in low esteem, men realize best the dignity of simple existence apart from the ability to grab.

On the south side of Plaza San Francisco is a heavily built feed stable of adobe, fronted by an arcade. In the western end of the long arcade half a dozen Indian girls, wrapped in brilliant mantillas, sold *piquante* at little tables. Beside them on the bare packed earth boiled caldrons of the peppery stuff.

They fired their pots now and then with dried droppings, and no sooner had they finished that task than they scooped up a double handful of peppers to throw into the stew, and next moment ladle out fiery portions to their customers.

A little way from the *piquante* tables, out in the plaza, a Colombian jockey rode a bucking mule. The fellow had on a green velvet jacket. He sat the animal carelessly, and in the midst of its leaps and stiff-legged falls, he extolled to a prospective buyer how well broken the animal was, what an amiable disposition the mule possessed, how it would work from *alba* to *tardecita* (dawn to twilight) without so much as backing an ear, a willing mule, a sincere mule——

Amidst this oratory and bucking, he found time to flash a smile of brilliant teeth at the *piquante* girls. Lassiter wondered vaguely if he were too old to ride like that. The jockey was some twenty-three or four. Then the financial agent's attention wandered to a llama that was hissing like a snake; then to a man tying a stone to a jack's tail to keep it from braying.

As a background for this kaleidoscopic scene arose the cone of Pichincha far to the east in flashing silver and purple. Against this arose the spires and domes of the city, the twin towers of the cathedral, the weather observation bureau on top of the Prensa building, the monastery of the Gray Friars. From the height of the volcano there swept down great ridges of tufa that embraced the city in vast bluish arms. Lassiter's attention to the landscape was diverted by Birdsong's calling him.

The colporteur was bargaining with the man in the green jacket to hire his mules for the expedition. The jockey's English had flickered out among the higher numerals. Lassiter walked over and picked up the conversation in Spanish.

"What do you want for your mules, *señor?*"

"Where do you wish to go, *señor?*"

"East, through Corriente, past the Rio Vampiro——"

The expression on the vender's face stopped Lassiter.

"Not the Rio Vampiro?"

"Yes, on through the Ticunas into Brazil."

The Colombian looked at Lassiter with a loose jaw.

"The *señor* is mad!"

"I was never clearer-headed."

"Then you have never been to the Rio Vampiro."

"No."

"I have."

"Then you'll make the very guide."

The Colombian stroked a polished black mustache and broke into a nervous laugh.

"*Señores,* the man who has been in the Rio Vampiro makes no guide at all. He has learned his lesson. I would not go there again for two hundred sucres a month."

"I'll give a hundred-and-fifty."

The man in the green jacket frowned and pulled hard at his mustachio. His black eyes seemed staring at something disagreeable.

"But, *señores,* I warn you," he flung out, "that is a vampire country—in that country——"

"I've heard so," interrupted Lassiter indifferently.

"It is not hearsay with me," declared the Colombian warmly. "Look——"

He stepped nearer Lassiter, bringing with him the odor of mules and of his own unwashed body.

"Look——"

He tipped his head to one side and the movement drew the skin of his neck up from under the greasy collar of his green velvet coat. This drew a peculiar withered spot on the skin into view.

Lassiter looked at it uncomprehendingly.

"A vampire, *señor,* right over that big vein," explained the vender. "My *camarado* discovered it just as I lay stretched out breathing my last. The beast was as big as an eagle. It was fluttering over me, fanning me deeper into my last sleep, when he rushed up and beat it off with a stick. Ah, *señores,* many a time has Balthasar Nunes gambled with death, but never before—never before—pardon me, *señores, un momento,* I think the *señoritas* are listening. I will explain to them. I could not rest in Heaven if I thought the gentle bosom of any woman held a question unanswered by Balthasar Nunes——"

Here he made rather a fine bow to the Americans and withdrew to the *piquante* stands.

Just how Balthasar discovered the women were listening, Lassiter never knew. Balthasar's back had been to them. Lassiter turned and watched the Colombian display the withered spot on his neck. To observe it, the cream-colored women moved past Balthasar in a line, like sightseers at a side-show. One of them touched the place with the tip of her finger.

During the procession, Señor Nunes gave a new and enlarged version of his adventure with the vampire. After a five minute description of how he skirted death, Lassiter heard him say that his last thoughts, just before he lost consciousness were that a dark-eyed, adorable Indian madonna was stooping over him, lifting him, pressing him to her bosom with kisses like *piquante*——"

The girls blushed and gasped—

"*Piquante!*"

"*Si, señoritas, piquante!*" cried Nunes with hand to heart. "And my miserable *camarado* waked me from a dream like that! *Mio Dios!* How I wish I could have died in such a dream! When I gained strength I was furious! He tried to appease me. I would not hear him. We divided the gold—for the Rio Vampiro is lined with gold—and parted—"

Balthasar cast liquid eyes at the *piquante* venders—

"Can you blame me?"

"It was a very impious wish, *señor,*" trembled the one who had touched the scar.

Señor Nunes smote a hand on his brow.

"A man's brain is a furnace, *señorita*, when he looks into such black almond eyes; the holy saints do not hold his words against his soul."

He gave a great sigh as if he were about to melt into the *piquante* girl's arms, then shrugged and said:

"Now I must go back and dicker over the mules with those *Americanos.* No doubt they are *caballeros* (gentlemen) in their cold fashion, but they think of nothing but mules."

All the girls lifted their eyes to the foreigners and smiled faintly before they returned to their task of collecting droppings for their pots.

Balthasar's philandering vaguely annoyed Lassiter, yet the agent was a trifle amused at Balthasar's Latin notion that kisses in Heaven tingled with *piquante.* When he thought it over, he was forced to admit that it was more interesting than the idea diffused through American theology that kisses in Heaven were chilly and infrequent—if, indeed, they were permitted at all.

The Colombian returned from the *piquante* girls with a beaming face. For some reason Lassiter began a little bruskly:

"I will give you a hundred and fifty sucres a month, Señor Nunes, and no more."

Balthasar seemed a little surprized at such brevity, which is not in accord with Spanish-American traditions. He paused a moment, then asked—

"What do you want packed, *señor?*"

"Bibles."

Balthasar stared.

"Bibles—pack Bibles out in that devil's country?"

Birdsong caught the drift of these Spanish words.

"Brother Nunes," he interposed, "where is a better place for spreaden the blessed Word than in a land of sin and wickedness?"

Balthasar looked at the man from Arkansas.

"Oh—*you* want the Bibles packed!" as if he did not find that so incomprehensible.

"Yes, I hope I am one of His chosen vessels, Brother Nunes."

"And what do *you* want packed?" inquired the muleteer of Lassiter.

"I am his helper," said the Stendill agent.

"You are what?"

"This gentleman's assistant," repeated Lassiter with a certain pointedness.

Nunes looked from one to the other, plainly incredulous, and also speculating. Presently he began again.

"It is a noble work— May I ask, Señor Lassiter, how long you have been in the business of selling Bibles?"

"We don't sell them——"

"We're spreaden the Word and sowen the seed," interpolated Birdsong earnestly.

The Colombian nodded.

"Certainly—spreading the Word—*muy bien*——"

Here he took each of his prospective employers by the edges of their ponchos, and with a confidential nodding of the head led them farther away from the crowd. The smell of mules again wafted to Lassiter. When at a safe distance, the muleteer glanced around and began in a half tone:

"*Señores*, men do not risk their lives in the Rio Vampiro without a cause. You come from America to go to the Rio Vampiro—to distribute Bibles—that is your cause, is it not?"

"Yes," agreed Lassiter impatiently, "if you want to take us——"

"*Un momento*—You are *Americanos.* You come to Ecuador, dress up as *muleros* and go to the Rio Vampiro—to distribute Bibles—that is your cause, is it not?"

"Look here!" snapped Lassiter. "If you'll take us, say so, if you won't——"

"Do not feel nervous, *mi amigo,*" soothed the muleteer. "All is well. You are most fortunate—Ah, you are most fortunate to fall in with Dom Pedro Balthasar Nunes, a man of infinite discretion. Any other *mulero* would wonder why two Americans disguised themselves as *muleros* to carry Bibles into the Rio Vampiro country—They would be curious——"

"To save lost souls," interposed Birdsong.

"Whose lost souls?" asked Balthasar cryptically.

"Why—just any lost soul," replied Birdsong, a little at loss. However one of his pet phrases came to his aid and he added, "The harvest is white, but the laborers are few."

Nunes nodded with a faint dry smile, pulling down his mustachios.

"Surely—What simpler?—I am discreet. I do not ask what is in your Bibles. I do not ask what you are going to do with them——"

"We're going to give them away," said Lassiter.

"*Precisamente*—give them away in the Rio Vampiro—trust my discretion. I have never been any too good friends with the police myself, and—I shoot very well with a *pistolete.*"

Here he reached into the back of his green jacket, pulled the lining around and cautiously displayed the butt of a very modern automatic.

"I'll go for five hundred sucres a month," he concluded.

"Look here," cried Lassiter, caught off guard at this jump, "we're not afraid of the police!"

"Neither am I, *señor.*" Nunes tapped the tail of his jacket.

"I mean the police are not after us."

"And they will not be, *señor*—trust my discretion—if you hire me."

This last phrase was put so significantly that Lassiter thought it best to put down his rising temper. It was clear the Colombian was prepared to bring down the Quito police on them unless they came to his terms. An investigation undoubtedly would expose Lassiter's identity. The fact that he was traveling incog from Quito would be headlined up and down the West Coast. He would have to give over his plan or reconstruct it with an infinity of precautions.

Balthasar watched the Stendill agent's face.

"Only five hundred sucres," he suggested, shrugged, spread his hands. "What is five hundred sucres to *Americanos,* who are rich—and always in a hurry?"

Lassiter decided this was the cheapest secrecy in sight.

"All right, we start tomorrow."

"But wait," interrupted Birdsong. "I can not afford to pay two hundred and fifty dollars a month just for mules——"

"I'll fix that," said Lassiter.

"Yes," nodded Balthasar, "your assistant Bible giver will fix a little thing like that, Señor Birdsong."

"Praise the Lord," said Birdsong.

BALTHASAR'S bit of blackmail turned out, on the whole, rather a stroke of luck for the expedition. The Colombian was very useful in translating the Quichua dialect of the Indians. When the mules and their Bible packs were in the mountains, Lassiter found his Castilian of little service. Not only did the Indians not understand pure Spanish, they distrusted every one who spoke the language. Four centuries of slavery, peonage and inquisition have crushed out of the Indian the last shred of faith in the Spaniard.

Undoubtedly the Quichuas are the most wretched human beings on the globe. The villages through which the colporteurs passed were mere kennels of adobe and stone stuck up on the mountainsides. Along the more abrupt heights in these villages were strung rudimentary stone fences to keep the children from dashing into space and being killed below.

The houses themselves were dug partly in the earth and were without windows, so the observer looked down into black kennel-like holes. Smoke poured from these holes, because there were no chimneys. Such excavations formed the home, stable, poultry house, sty and dog-kennel all rolled into one.

It pleased Ezekiel Birdsong to buy a hand bell in Quito and he made a processional through these miserable villages, and sometimes singing the hymns so popular with rural revivals.

The Arkansan's penetrating nasal yowling and his bell formed a clamorous introduction to these villages. As he passed through at the tail of his mules, anything was likely to pop out of the huts to view the disturbance—a pig, a milk goat, a dog, a game-cock, an Indian woman followed by the rest of her tenants, for all held equal tenure in these motley domiciliaries.

The Indian housewives who heaved themselves up into the cold mountain sunshine were invariably shapeless creatures, weaving ponchos for their lords out of vicuna wool, or a Panama hat, with the fibers spraying off at the point of labor.

The housewife was always ugly with an ugliness that was appalling, but among her brood, there would be almost surely two or three dark-eyed, sad-faced girls, who came out with the pigs and goats and stood staring at the strange procession.

It was these girls coming out of the crevices in the rocks that made this groveling existence human to Lassiter. Often these girl faces held that strange quality of wistfulness that belongs to youth and maidenhood. Of what they dreamed, Lassiter could not imagine. What they were to become, he saw too plainly: Hags in a hole, used and shapeless, flowers crushed in a sty.

And Zeke Birdsong came along and gave them little Spanish Testaments.

The futility of the gift, the fanatical earnestness of the giver always struck Lassiter with a sad irony. Sometimes he would wonder if by any possible means the little Testaments could be of the slightest moral or intellectual value to these girls.

He never thought of any of the other denizens except the girls. Their faces always gave him the impression of something delicate and precious being wasted.

Birdsong, however, had much wider sympathies, no doubt because he was a father of both boys and girls. Between villages, trudging at his mule's tail, he would talk of his beneficiaries.

"That was a fine chunk of a boy," he would say. "I hope he will read that Testament and grow up into a preacher." Or—"That was a good-hearted old woman with the red shawl. I hope she sees the light and I meet her in Heaven."

Birdsong used this last phrase so much, one could say he tramped at a mule's heels through the Andes, extending invitations to Indians to meet him in Heaven.

Lassiter looked on Heaven as medieval nonsense, but Birdsong, through his interpreter, talked of it so earnestly, so concretely—apparently he was acquainted with the pearly gates down to their hasps and hinges—that at intervals a strange fancy drifted across the financier's mind, that maybe, somewhere, there was such a place—somewhere—and he would look up at the icy peaks freezing against the abyss of the sky.

WITHOUT Balthasar not one Bible could have been given away. The first village they entered refused to accept a single book. The Indians thought it was some new trick of priests to bring down on their heads new and devastating ecclesiastical dues. However, Balthasar's eloquence reassured them. He explained that these men were good American bank robbers who were giving away Bibles as a penance for their sins. The Indians, thus assured that they were dealing with simple cutthroats, gained confidence and took the little books.

By the time the expedition had camped two nights on the trail, word, somehow, had passed ahead of their penitent and benevolent mission, and the colporteurs found the Indians eager for the Testaments. In fact, on two occasions, the little books themselves had been passed on ahead of the expedition.

In one village, the men found an Indian who had a bullet wound in his arm. He had bound one of the Testaments tightly over the place. He declared to Balthasar that all pain left him when he applied the book. On the following day they discovered an Indian woman, who was expecting confinement, drinking a tea made of Testament leaves.

Birdsong caught these patent miracles to his heart, and overflowed with thanksgiving in both prayer and song. He saw himself an evangel attended by the hosts of Heaven. He would stretch a string of miracles through Ecuador and prepare the way for—as near as Lassiter could get the idea—for an enormous revival.

For a while Lassiter argued mildly with Birdsong about the authenticity of these miracles. He attempted to explain to Birdsong that the patient was probably healed by the workings of their own subconscious minds—but in the gulf of the subconscious, Lassiter quickly lost his own bearings.

As for Birdsong, he had no idea what subconscious meant. He rebutted everything by his unassailable argument—

"If the Lord wanted to work miracles with His Testaments, He could, couldn't He?"

After that, Birdsong recommended his books as a nostrum for all the ills of the flesh.

As Lassiter trudged day after day, behind his mule, goading it on under its pack of Bibles, there were times when he felt that he was moving in some kind of delirium and would presently awake, with a high fever, no doubt, in his New York apartment.

At the end of eight days' journeying, the expedition was widely advertised. At each camp came Indians bringing gifts—*olla podrida*, chickens to cook, potatoes, mangoes, or cakes of ice brought down by the donkeys from snow fields five thousand feet higher up.

As they journeyed farther and farther east, the villages became more widely scattered, for they were reaching the fringe of Ecuadorian civilization, which is the department of Corriente.

At the village of Canelos, an Indian boy offered to carry a sack of Bibles over to Bujeo, the last civilized village toward the east, and allow the white men to turn back. The men of Canelos told strange tales of the country beyond Bujeo. It belonged, they said, to a tribe called the Jivaros, who fed strangers to their gods.

Birdsong interrupted these tales with pious ejaculations:

"Lead me to my chosen field, O Lord! Show Thy power to the heathen Jivaros!"

The more terrible were the stories of the men of Canelos, the more determined Birdsong was to go on. On the ninth morning the white men reached Bujeo. A handful of wretched Indians lived here, and by some miracle the white men's coming was known to them. The whole village met the colporteurs.

After each person had received a testament of medicinal and spiritual value, the Bujeans implored the three men to go no farther. They would surely be lost in the infernal land of the Jivaros.

By this time, Birdsong was harrying his mule in his eagerness to reach a post of genuine danger and miraculous service. The expedition was soon on its way again.

One of the Bujeans, an Indian named Chombo Meone, attached himself to the colporteurs for several hours. As they ascended the rising slopes of the eastern range of the Andes, Chombo told Lassiter a most fantastic tale, which he hoped would turn back the adventurers. This was the tale:

WHEN Chombo was a boy his mother died. He consulted a monk as to the state of her soul and was shocked to find that she was probably still in purgatory. Ten masses might win freedom for her.

Unfortunately, Chombo did not have enough money to pay for ten masses, so he took three.

Now every one in Bujeo knew that the Rio Vampiro was lined with nuggets of gold the size of a man's head, but the difficulty was, it all belonged to the King of the Jivaros, or that is to say, the devil.

Chombo explained his predicament to the monk, and the good man told Chombo if he would learn a prayer to subdue the devil, he could probably go to the Rio Vampiro, get the gold and return in safety.

Chombo agreed to this, so the monk, who knew all sorts of prayers, taught him a prayer, and the Indian set out. Sure enough, he found the valley of the Rio Vampiro scattered with gold. He filled his packs so full his poor donkey could scarcely crawl. He goaded the beast at every step and cursed it by all the saints in the calendar, but unfortunately black night fell upon him before he was clear of the land of the Jivaros. So he camped, refreshed himself with cocoa leaves, said the prayer seven times, then wrapped himself in his poncho and fell asleep.

He had the most horrible dreams.

When he awoke, his bags were gone, and his donkey hung to a tree by a cord, strangled as if it had been a sparrow. Who could pull a donkey up a tree by a cord except the devil?

Chombo had the presence of mind to cut off a piece of the cord as proof of his story and then fled the place.

At the conclusion of this extraordinary narrative, Chombo drew from under his poncho his embroidered bag of ashes and cocoa leaves, opened it and displayed the bit of cord he had salvaged from the tragedy. It was a piece of silk cord about an inch and a half long, greasy from years of handling.

The Stendill agent looked at the shred of silk around which Chombo had woven such a fantasy. He avoided expressing his skepticism by inquiring after the present state of Chombo's mother's soul. Chombo hoped the good woman had been in Paradise for several years.

During the last mile or two, Chombo had talked with a certain nervous haste and many glances out over the boulder-strewn mountainside. Now that he had finished, he walked on a bit farther with some desultory conversation, then made his adieus and turned back to Bujeo.

At first he moved off on the return trail with sufficient dignity, but the farther he got from the white men the more quickly he stepped. At seventy-five paces, he began to trot. At a hundred yards he was in full flight, running as if the very King of the Jivaros were on his heels.

The white men watched him curiously, until his poncho diminished to a bit of fluttering red far down among the gray stones, and he vanished around a turn in the trail.

III

CHOMBO MEONE'S flight down the mountainside lent a certain authenticity to his story which his words had failed to convey. For several moments, Lassiter stood looking down the trail, speculating on what the Bujean could have seen years ago that sent him homeward today at such a scamper. Then, too, the fact that Chombo possessed a piece of silk cord grew upon the promoter as rather inexplicable. Troglodytes, such as the Quichuas, are not given to silks.

Birdsong accepted Meone's narrative in word and substance. The Indian had adventured with the devil, and straight ahead lay the battle-ground where he, Ezekiel Birdsong, would meet and conquer the infernal hosts with the sword of the spirit. He prodded his mule forward. What daunted the Indian spurred the zealot.

The terrane up which the expedition toiled smacked of Chombo's narrative. It was of volcanic origin and it stretched upward as scoriated as the slopes of Hinnon itself. It was a formidable landscape. It appeared to Lassiter as if a vast, gray flood had been transfixed in stone in the instant of tumultuous descent. In one place its stony waves still lashed at the sky; in another, huge swirls from some long cooled maelstrom still held its contour; in yet others washes of vitreous green slag simulated the troughs of a stormy sea. This huge and strange terrane led upward, apparently to a plateau, which formed a pass through the snowy barricade of the Andes.

A cold wind swept down from the snow fields and worried at the men's ponchos and at the Bible packs. The trail which they had followed so far ceased to exist on the lava field. They worked upward by guess and chance. Their progress upward became a tortuous ant-like twisting with endless hesitations, back-turnings and retracings.

Indeed the hugeness of their surroundings dwarfed men and mules to the proportions of insects. They might very well have been a little string of ants creeping upward on the obscure and twiddling errand of such creatures.

It all must have affected Ezekiel Birdsong's imagination as the very outlands of hell. He was a Parsifal riding against the battlements of Klingsor, or rather, since the Arkansan's mind was untouched by the Wagnerian cycle, he was a child of the living God challenging the regents of Sin and Death.

Lassiter often looked at him, a short, compact, sun-burned man with oily black hair, shoving at his mule, steadying his pack and shouting his lugubrious hymns—Lassiter often looked at him, and the thought came to the Stendill agent more than once that the apostles of Christ, the fishermen and publicans who had made these Bible packs possible, must have been just such tough, sun-browned, indomitable rustics.

At other times the promoter in Lassiter asserted itself. He thought of the tourist trade. He visioned these cyclopæn scenes unrolling beneath the hull of a dirigible. What a tourist-catcher it would be! It would soon instate itself in the world's imagination as one of those obligatory tours, such as the Alps, the Yosemite, the Pyramids, the Grand Cañon, Stratford on Avon, which all real personages perform, thereby dispersing any doubt as to their culture.

So absorbed became the financier in this idea, that he would lose consciousness of his struggle upward, of his slippery charges up glazed redoubts, of his shovings at his mule's flank. In imagination he would be floating in a Stendill air-liner high above these discomforts. The ant meditated wings.

NEAR sundown the exploring party reached the level of the pass. Once up, their going was easier. Here the lava had weathered to a soil, and even a little grass broke out, like a sort of greenish skum on disturbed waters.

The relief from climbing and the color of the sunset picked up the spirits of the expedition. Balthasar, at the flank of the lead mule, broke into whistling a gay incontinent fandango. He supplied the castanets by snapping his fingers, and then, charmed by his own music, fell to twisting and swinging his hips as he walked, or rather capered along.

Birdsong, who followed the Colombian, stopped his hymn singing at this lickerish pantomime and watched his fellow muleteer in righteous disapproval. Condemnation was written in the Arkansan's very back and stride.

Lassiter, who brought up the van, was tired from his climb, but this little dumb show amused him. He walked beside his own mule with heavy legs. Also he tilted his foot a little to one side, to protect a new blister that had formed on his left great toe. However, the color of the dying day presently weaned his mind both from the little comedy and from the trifling discomforts of his own body. The sunlight streaming through the mountain defiles behind him gave him the impression of enormous hoses playing streams of gold upon the peaks ahead, while to the eastern sides of the mountains clung the night like a blue bubble.

Presently Lassiter's attention was drawn from this splendor by the sound of Birdsong exhorting Nunes in a queer mongrel of English, Spanish and Quichua. In the rarefied air, their voices came to him thinly.

Like so many well-meaning persons, Birdsong had endured the dance, and had suppressed his irritation to the breaking point; it had now become impossible for him to request the Colombian courteously to stop.

The first sentence Lassiter heard was Birdsong's nasal explosion—

"Look here, Brother Nunes, don't you know the devil is firing up his grill this minute, for such sinners as you are!"

The Colombian stared around at this thunderbolt out of an evening sky.

"Why is he, Señor Birdsong?" he inquired in a most amiable mood.

"To roast them dirty dances out of you!"

The Colombian drew a bit of shuck and tobacco from his green jacket and gravely began a cigaret.

"I know persons, Señor Birdsong, whom the devil himself couldn't roast a dance out of——"

The colporteur looked at him hard.

"If you are trying to throw slurs on my soupleness, Brother Nunes, I'll have you understand there ain't a man in Yell County, Arkansas, that can tear down 'Cotton-Eye Joe' slicker than I can."

"I'd enjoy seeing it done, wouldn't you, Señor Lassiter?"

Lassiter was too wary to be led into the discussion.

"Brother Nunes, I wouldn't shake a leg in 'Cotton-Eye Joe' or 'Turkey in the Straw,' not for all the filthy pleasure this world can hold."

Nunes lit his cigaret and inhaled luxuriously.

"Señor Birdsong," he said, in a muffled voice, talking the smoke out of his mouth and nostrils, "if you really could dance, you would not be so prejudiced against it. That is always the way. Fat men dislike the fandango; stiff men abominate the waltz; awkward men——"

"Look here, Brother Nunes, when I say I can dance, I can dance."

"Still, it's easier to talk than to dance."

The colporteur looked straight at the muleteer, seemed to make up his mind, and next moment began humming one of those monotonous jumbles of sound such as the fiddlers among the hill-folk of Tennessee and Arkansas evoke. Next moment he gave a whoop, leaped into the air, clicked his heels together three times and landed on the tufa in a southern backwoods breakdown.

Amid the majestic surroundings, his stocky dancing figure formed a grotesque spectacle. Birdsong squatted on his heels, shooting out his legs like pistons.

"This is 'Layin' Off Corn!' " he shouted at the skeptical Colombian. Suddenly he half rose, and retained the posture with hands and feet criss-crossing in a flurry of agility.

" 'Plantin' the Seed!' " he yelled.

When this was established to a machine-like virtuosity, he shifted and began switching in his toes.

" 'Kiverin' the Row!' " he called. "And now I'm 'Layin' By!' "

Here he fell into a motion of such swiftness that he jiggled up and down like a marionette. He seemed to blur. He seemed to have four flying legs and two shadowy heads.

It was the most remarkable exhibition of strength and agility Lassiter had ever seen. At first he was amused and amazed. Then his amusement ceased.

Jigs or breakdowns among the mountaineers of Tennessee, Georgia and North Carolina are really expressions of their harsh, arid lives. They are awkward, fantastic, and are based on a sort of grim travesty of the labor of the hill-folk, or the movements of animals; such as turkeys scratching in straw, hogs dashing through canebrakes, men and women stooping in weariness over sterile, stony soil. But the dancing of these grotesque steps is a feat of strength.

Lassiter was too sensitive not to catch the bleakness of soul among a people who could evolve such a dance. That bleakness was written not only in Birdsong's steps and furious leaps and jerks, but it was in the rigid staring face which he maintained throughout the performance.

It was a dance of desolation, of blind graceless reaction against suppression. It formed an illuminating commentary to Lassiter on all the mouthings of hell-fire, Satan's power, eternal damnation, everlasting flames, and a hundred other revivalistic catch-phrases he had heard fall from Birdsong's lips. The jig held a spiritual tragedy in its unloveliness.

What Balthasar thought of this gringo dance, he gave no indication. His Latin courtesy probably repressed a smile, or a shudder.

Birdsong stopped as abruptly as he began, dripping with sweat. His thick-barreled chest heaved. For a moment he stood staring at his audience of two.

"Señor Birdsong," began the Colombian, "that was a—an unusual dance, a remarkable——"

He broke off because Birdsong's face underwent a queer change. The colporteur whitened under his sweat. Amid his panting he gasped out:

"My God, what have I done? Merciful Redeemer—what have I done? Me, a vessel of the Blessed Truth——"

He lapsed into the silence and the stoicism of his kind.

Lassiter looked at him. Such remorse was written even in his hard-lined face that the agent was moved to express a doubt whether such an acrobatic performance was a dance.

Birdsong shook his head gloomily.

"I know you mean well, Brother Lassiter, but the devil is using your tongue to lead me to destruction—The devil is right here, watching us this minute—he's here! Right now! Just as shore as when he choked Chombo Meone's mule!"

The colporteur's gesture, the look of the huge, igneous pass, and the memory of Chombo's tale, all helped produce an illusion of some veritable malign presence. Birdsong caught his mule, which had backed away from its master's uncanny performance. The little company started ahead again, but the incident completely removed all lilt of gaiety that had inspired them.

Balthasar resumed his lead. He seemed to be pondering something, and presently he said—

"Señor Birdsong, you have a queer religion—mostly about the devil."

"He is our arch enemy, Brother Nunes. See how he tempted me to pride in my strength—lowly worm of the dust that I am."

"Surely there is no harm in kicking one's legs?"

"Suppose my blessed Redeemer had called me home while I was jigging like that, don't you know I would have gone as straight to hell as you'll go when you die, heathen though you be, and child of the living God though I be."

Birdsong's continual contrast of his own righteousness to Nunes's sinfulness pricked the skin of the easy-going Colombian. He seemed about to retort when he broke off abruptly and the forward mule came to a halt; then it began to back away with that down-dropping of its haunches characteristic of frightened mules. Balthasar remained staring downward. Birdsong came up with him and fell into the same transfixed gaze. Lassiter hurried forward and a moment later joined their amazement.

BEFORE the trio, the plateau dropped away into a vast chasm. The abyss was as unheralded as the Grand Cañon, and appeared more prodigious. How deep it was, Lassiter could form no idea because night already had curtained its profundity. Its width, he was equally unable to gauge because the yellow haze of sunset veiled its eastward reach. Although Lassiter was twenty feet from the brink, a sense of vertigo caused him to back away.

After a long gaze, Nunes said—

"*Señores*, this is the end of the trail."

And Birdsong replied—

"If we are forced to stop here, brothers, it is because I have just proved myself an unworthy vessel."

A faint mirth stirred in Lassiter's brain.

"I fancy this chasm would have been here, Birdsong, if you hadn't danced."

"That may be true, Brother Lassiter, but God in His foreknowledge must have foreseen that I would fall from grace just where I did, and He prepared this huge holler as a signal of His divine displeasure."

"Preparedness," said the Stendill agent soberly.

"If He don't show me the way across this bottomless pit tomorrow," said the Arkansan somberly, "I'll know my name ain't recorded in the Book of Life."

At that moment from far down in the darkness of the abyss there shot up into the eyes of the travelers a beam of scarlet light. It looked as if it were shining out of immense depth. It stared out of the very bowels of the earth.

Balthasar gasped and crossed himself. A shivery sensation went over even Lassiter himself. Only Birdsong entirely kept his courage. He advanced to the margin of the abyss calling on God to burn the filth and wickedness out of his heart.

At that moment the light winked out as abruptly as it had sprung into view. It gave Lassiter the impression that the bowels of the earth had closed over it. The promoter stood looking down into the blackness.

"How deep is it?" he asked of nobody. A thought came to him. He drew out his watch and marked the second hand in the yellow light. "Heave over a stone, Balthasar, I'll measure its depth by seconds."

The Colombian shook his head. "No, *señor*, I'd heave over a stone and crush a man's head at once, but when the King of the Jivaros stares up at me—that's different."

"Chuck something in, Birdsong."

The man from Yell picked up a ten-pound boulder and flung it into the abyss. Balthasar backed away as if expecting some monster to emerge from the emptiness. The two Americans stood listening ten—fifteen—twenty seconds—but no sound ever returned from their plummet. Lassiter slowly restored his watch to his pocket.

"I don't guess it's got no bottom, Brother Lassiter," said the Arkansan, who took such a phenomenon quite simply.

The trio set about pitching camp. With this friendly task, the Stendill agent shook off somewhat his feeling of the abnormous. He and Birdsong put up the tent, unrolled the bedding and picked up wood for a campfire while Nunes tethered the mules and gathered grass for their provender.

By the time the three men got down to their own supper, the last touch of carmine burned on the peaks and a few pale stars glittered over the shoulders of the mountains.

After supper the men sat speculating on the light they had seen in the profound. The beam had not suggested fire. The financial agent ran over a list of possibilities, a phosphorescent display, a searchlight, a signal fire, even a vent in the volcano.

Nunes was convinced that he had looked into the baleful eye of the King of the Jivaros. Even to Lassiter, Chombo Meone's story did not seem so improbable now as it did in Bujeo.

Birdsong was the gloomiest of the three companions. He had seen the gates of hell gaping at him as a reproof because he had driven another spear into the side of Christ by his wicked dancing.

From what the agent could gather, Birdsong believed that the abyss and the mysterious light were created by the Supreme Being for the single and particular purpose of rebuking his ungainly antics.

Such vast and unconscious egotism amazed Lassiter. He tried to show the colporteur the infinite disparity between a man's ephemeral tenure of life and the ageless foundations of the earth.

"Brother Lassiter," drawled the revivalist, "I'll be resting in the bosom of Abraham when these here mountains are washed down in the bottom of the sea." He looked up at the immemorial peaks standing dark against the star-powdered sky.

The Stendill agent sat looking at the fellow with his oily black hair gleaming and winking in the gleam and wink of the firelight. He was warming himself by a couple of fagots—and forecasting his existence for æons to come. The essential irony of it filled the promoter with a kind of melancholy.

"I hope He forgives my sin, Brother Lassiter."

"I hope so, Birdsong."

"I'm going to wrastle with Him in prayer tonight. I'll wrastle all night or git my answer. If He sends His miraculous power and helps me down into this bottomless pit tomorrow, so's I can spread His holy Word, I'll know He's received me as His child again. I'm sorry I displeased Him, Brother Lassiter."

The promoter allowed the conversation to lapse, and smoked a cigar to dull his thoughts for sleep. As the camp-fire died down, the promoter wrapped himself in his blankets and settled himself for the night. Birdsong got up and went outside to his prayer.

The Stendill agent lay awake for upward of an hour, looking at the coals, watching sparks flare into tiny brilliance and die, listening to the drone of the colporteur's prayer as he prayed never to die.

Lassiter never knew quite when he fell asleep, or whether he fell asleep at all or not. It seemed to him that one moment he heard the colporteur outside praying, and the next, Birdsong was by his side, shaking his shoulder and flashing an electric torch in his face. Birdsong was undressed and evidently had been in bed. Now he leaned down and whispered to Lassiter that something was bothering the mules.

The Stendill agent got to attention with difficulty and after some blinking reflection managed to inquire what the mules were bothered about.

The man from Yell did not waste speech, but aroused Nunes by flashing the light in his face. The Colombian sat up suddenly, gasping out—

"*Señores*, she is innocent—do not imagine——"

The Arkansan hustled his companions into their faculties and bade them listen outside. The men listened. In the direction of the mules they heard a queer scratching and a padded bumping.

The New Yorker was not impressed that anything could be done until the colporteur opened the flap of the tent and motioned his companions to follow him. Lassiter crawled out of his blankets without enthusiasm, found his shoes, then followed shivering into the cold night air.

THERE was no moon. The conformation of the lava lay uncertain in the starlight. The colporteur walked toward the mules playing his light in front of him. It illuminated the burned ground for twelve or fifteen feet, then faded into darkness. Lassiter shivered from the chill. Presently the three dark figures behind the spurt of light could see the bulk of two mules lying down.

By this time all unusual sounds had died down. Lassiter was inclined to get back to his blankets. But with a countryman's persistence, Birdsong stood switching his light here and there, looking for the third mule.

"H-He can't hobble far in his tether," chattered Balthasar.

"Yes, but he may fall over the cliff."

Birdsong turned his light in this direction and peered into the darkness.

The three stood for several moments, listening, trying to locate the lost mule when with a sense of relief Lassiter saw the animal's eyes shining some fifty feet back toward their camp. He pointed it out.

"Now we got to round it up careful," cautioned the Arkansan. "A mule's a plumb fool at night. We don't want it loping off that clift. We better spread out and git between it and the jump-off."

The men accepted the directions and began a deploying movement around the stray. Lassiter kept his eyes fixed on the glowing points and knocked his shins against cusps of lava in the darkness. His climb the preceding day had made the inside of his thighs and his shoulders sore. He kept sidling around his quarry, mentally querulous of his discomfort, when he chanced to observe another pair of eyes glowing beside those of the mule.

For a full half minute, Lassiter kept sidling among the stones, so near asleep was he, before the significance of these new eyes dawned upon him. By this time he had stepped into a refractive angle where he saw still another pair of sparks glittering at him from the blackness.

The Stendill agent stopped stock still. A curious tickling sensation flowed from his scalp to his toes. With much crisper steps he got back to Birdsong and the light. He reached out and took the Arkansan by the arm.

"Zeke——"

"Yeh."

"Did you know there was something else . . . something . . ."

"Yeh, I see its eyes."

"What is it, Zeke?" asked Lassiter nervously. "You—you understand about stock——"

"Something layin' flat on that old mule's neck."

"But what?"

"I got to ketch her and see," whispered the man from Yell, and next moment he strode briskly forward.

At Birdsong's approach the glints withdrew at the rate of the man's approach; then a strange thing happened. A heavy bumping and thumping set up not at the glints at all, but about ten feet to one side of the stalkers. Lassiter was startled. Birdsong switched his light on the commotion.

Next moment, in the harsh black and white light appeared the body of the third mule dragging and bumping over the stones.

At the same instant Balthasar opened fire with his automatic. Its spurt of flames stabbed the darkness, and by the position of each flash, Lassiter saw the Colombian was charging whatever man or creature lay before him.

The promoter shouted a warning about the cliff. At that moment the automatic was exhausted. An abrupt silence took the place of its hard chatter.

Lassiter stood staring into absolute blackness, shivering violently.

"Balthasar!" he called. "Balthasar!"

Birdsong whisked the light about and after a few seconds picked up the Colombian on his knees, jamming cartridges into his pistol's butt. He suddenly began cursing a string of Spanish oaths.

"What's the matter?" cried the Stendill agent.

"He tried to lariat me, —— him! He threw me down! I'd have got him, *señor!* I'd have got the devil himself, —— him!"

The two men ran up, and sure enough there was a rope around Balthasar's legs. He got out with some difficulty. Then they took the flashlight and examined the edge of the abyss for eighty or a hundred yards up and down in front of their tent. It was quite empty. They went back to the rope which had tripped Balthasar. It was heavy silk. Then they walked over to the body of the third mule, and found a similar cord attached to it. This must have been a sort of tow rope used to drag the brute's carcass toward the abyss.

The mule itself was quite dead. A little further investigation showed the other two mules had also been killed.

IV

ON THE following morning, the three men held a sort of inquest over the dead mules. Lassiter examined the top side of one of the brutes, the men then heaved the body over and the promotor set to work on that side. He made a minute examination, brushing the hair the wrong way to get at the skin. He did not find a single cut or puncture or scratch. The three mules lay intact.

After some half hour's investigation, he glanced up as Nunes—

"What about strangulation?"

"Not that, *señor*, its tongue is in its mouth, its eyes are in their sockets, there are no marks on the neck."

Lassiter arose stiffly, brushed his palms together in an effort to rid them of the film of oil left by touching the animal.

"Suppose they were poisoned?"

"A mule will not eat at night, *señor.*"

"Then what could have killed them?"

The Colombian stared.

"Perhaps they were scared to death, *señor.*"

Lassiter looked up at the muleteer to see if he were jesting,

"What could scare the life out of a mule?"

The Colombian shrugged—

"Quien sabe, señor."

Ezekiel Birdsong, who was over among the mule packs reassembling his Bibles into man-sized bundles, called out—

"It must have been a man with a lariat, brothers, a man on horseback. We saw that much."

"We saw their eyes only, Señor Birdsong," corrected Nunes.

"And I saw six eyes," put in Lassiter wearily, for they had gone over the horseman theory several times.

"But you were excited, Brother Lassiter, no doubt you imagined the extra pair."

"Of course that's true, I may have," admitted the promoter, getting out a cigar and biting its end with a nervous snap, "but where did a horseman come from—out of the abyss, through the air, or up the trail?"

"It could have been a man riding up from Bujeos, who killed our mules and fled, *señor*."

"But how did he get away?" cried Lassiter. "Did he ride down the abyss, because whatever it was vanished in that direction right under Balthazar's pistol fire? A man couldn't ride down through space. No horse—no horse in the world—I tell you fellows it was a—a——"

Lassiter's fancy wandered vaguely among condors, wyverns, dinosaurii—he recalled that the American newspapers recently carried reports of a post-diluvian monster discovered in Africa. It was a prodigious thing— Perhaps here in South America—Then he thought of the silken lariat and dropped the theory.

"It's bound to be a *gaucho*," drawled Birdsong with irritating complacency, "because nothing but a hoss could drag a dead mule and nobody in South America can throw them lariats without nooses except *gauchos*."

Both Colombian and financier turned on the man from Arkansas.

"Who ever heard of a *gaucho* with a silk lariat, *señor?*"

"What would a *gaucho* be doing among the Andes, Birdsong?"

"Why should a *gaucho* kill our mules, *señor?*"

"And try to drag them over such a devilish high precipice at night, Birdsong?"

"You needn't get riled because I think it's a *gaucho*, brothers," placated the colporteur as he tied a bundle.

"Well—no, certainly not——"

"Pardon, *señor*, but—but the man who killed our mules must have come through the air, *no es verdad*, Señor Lassiter? And he went back the same way, *absolutemente*, I saw him go."

The Stendill agent relighted his cigar and conned this new hypothesis—a flying man—a man who could fly noiselessly— The idea began to paint a new fantasia before Lassiter's mind.

"Besides that," droned out Birdsong, "I saw this *gaucho* laying right down on his horse's neck."

The Stendill agent turned in irritation.

"Look here, Birdsong, *gauchos* live in the Argentine. How can you imagine one would be riding over the Andes at midnight?"

"And Señor Birdsong, how could a horseman come out of a chasm and go back into it again?"

"Brothers," drawled the colporteur, "if God saw fit to punish my filthy dancing by bringing a——"

"*Mio Dios!*" from Nunes.

"——," snapped the financier, "I might have known you thought——"

"Brother," explained Birdsong mildly, "last night, as I wrastled with God to get forgiveness for my filthy dancing, I asked Him to send down a miracle, if He would receive me back as His son."

"Well—you got one," agreed the Stendill agent, a little ashamed of his irritation. And he walked slowly back to the tent.

This carried him past the mule with the rope on its foot. It too lay scatheless, without a hair turned from ears to fetlocks except where the silk rope ruffed its right fore ankle. Lassiter looked at the attachment of the rope. It was simply wrapped around the dead mule's foreleg, *gaucho* fashion, as Birdsong had said. He stooped, cut off a piece of it, and continued toward the tent, examining it. At first it seemed an ordinary cord of silk composed of four strands, but when he unwound a strand and attempted to ravel it, he found to his surprise, that it was not composed of smaller threads, but it was of a colloidal nature and resembled a string of glue or celluloid.

The New Yorker looked at it curiously. It was not silk. It was a rope manufactured, so far as he knew, out of some entirely unknown substance by some unknown method.

This discovery brought back to his mind the idea that had been edging in when Birdsong's remark had interrupted. Was it possible some man had visited them during the night with a noiseless airplane? Did an unknown civilization exist in the hinterlands of the Andes that manufactured a silken cordage out of some unknown colloid?

The moment Lassiter hit on this theory, the various threads in this snarl of facts began to straighten. The killing of the mules, the selection of the spot, the light he had seen in the abyss, all became amenable to human motives.

"Besides that," drawled out Birdsong, evidently continuing some soliloquy, "them *gauchos* may have silk lassoes, I don't know——"

Lassiter was so pleased over his idea, this did not annoy him. He called back cheerfully—

"This isn't silk."

"Oh, it ain't," drawled the colporteur calmly. "I thought you said it was."

"I did, but it isn't."

Lassiter expected the man from Arkansas to ask its material; instead, Birdsong merely remarked—

"Then you see, maybe God did send a *gaucho* after all."

Lassiter burst out laughing.

"No, I don't. This is a new sort of rope, unknown to commerce. I am sure because the Stendill lines handle every sort of cordage from sisal to manilla hemp, from Egyptian——"

Balthasar Nunes turned and was staring at the colporteur's assistant.

"The Stendill lines, *señor*—what are the Stendill lines?"

Lassiter collected his wits.

"It's a rope factory in America where I used to work and—er—make lines—er—ropes and all sorts of cordage."

Nunes stroked his black mustache, cast an eye around at Birdsong and nodded agreeably.

Birdsong pursued the topic.

"Brother Lassiter, maybe the Lord provided that *gaucho* with a miraculous rope to get me past this bottomless pit made by the devil."

"No doubt—no doubt—" and he returned to his study of the rope.

The Colombian joined Lassiter and helped him study the new find. The two men walked into the tent to sit and smoke and talk. Birdsong continued his work outside.

"This will explain Chombo Meone's story," began Lassiter. "Take the supposition of the Jivaros, a small, but highly civilized people here in the Andes. If they wished to discourage contact with less cultured tribes, such as the Bujeans, would they not post guards in these mountains and kill the stock of travelers in an effort to frighten them?"

"Why wouldn't they kill the travelers themselves, *señor?*"

"Because they are civilized. You and I, for instance, we would avoid murder to the last extremity."

"Oh—*certainemente, absolutemente*," Balthasar nodded, strongly, "but, *señor*, why do you think the Jivaros are highly civilized?"

"This cordage suggests it. I never saw anything like it in the Stendill factories——"

The agent was rather pleased at the casual way in which he corroborated his own story.

"A noiseless airship would prove it; it would explain why we saw that searchlight in the abyss last night; it explains why our own lives were spared— Just think, they have flying machines which they can use indifferently as a tractor to draw a dead mule, or to sail away into the void. It will be many a year before our civilization duplicates that, my dear Balthasar."

Lassiter had a tenable theory now, and he felt good. He was hitting his conversational stride.

"But, *señor*, I thought the Jivaros were the fiends of hell."

"Natural enough, my dear Balthasar. No doubt the Jivaros have been working for years trying to inculcate exactly that belief among all the surrounding savages. It's high time some civilized person was getting in touch with these people, negotiating trade relations— Why, great goodness, man, think of the tonnage from an entirely untouched territory—ships could sail right out of here——"

"Ships! Ships sail out of here, *señor!*" cried Nunes in genuine alarm. "Surely, *señor*, last night's adventure has not turned your——"

The Colombian paused, staring at the American.

"I mean the ships of the Jivaros—the airships," explained the promotor, after a moment—"the sort we saw last night."

Nunes looked away over the chasm before them, then glanced back at Lassiter, then at the chasm again.

"I see," he nodded.

By this time, both men felt that the other was not talking frankly, and they dropped the subject of the Jivaros. The muleteer turned to neutral topics.

"I wonder what Señor Birdsong is going to do?"

* * *

LASSITER watched him. The short blocky rustic was carrying his newly made parcels one by one to the very edge of the abyss. Both Nunes and Lassiter jumped up and started toward him.

"Hey, Birdsong, what you want done?" called the promoter. "We make two hands, you know."

The colporteur turned about.

"Well," he said with his uncomfortable frankness, "I'm getting ready to go down into this place. I know you two fellows don't take much stock in the Lord's work. I didn't want to call on you to do anything."

"I don't like that," cried the New Yorker. "I'll admit I'm not the enthusiast you are, Birdsong, but when I start with a man I mean to see him— Say, how are you going to get down?"

Birdsong looked at him.

"I hate to tell you, Brother Lassiter."

"Why?" cried the agent, greatly surprized.

"Because when I mention anything about my Lord and Master, it seems like it kinder throws you and Brother Nunes in a bad temper."

Birdsong's drawl was monotonous as usual, but his words painted clearly enough his loneliness of soul. A qualm of self-reproach went through Lassiter.

"I'll help you carry the Bibles to the edge, Zeke," he proffered fraternally, "and you can tell me how you are going to get down if you care to." He followed the man from Yell to his bundles, picked up one and started to the edge.

"Well—it's just this," began Birdsong with a certain humble boldness, "I'm doing my part in spreaden the blessed Word among the heathen and I know the Lord'll do His. He'll git 'em down there somehow——"

"You—you expect a miracle to lift these books to the bottom of the cliff?"

"Yes, and me too, Brother Lassiter," agreed Birdsong simply; then he added, "You needn't carry none unless you want to, Brother Lassiter."

"Oh—I—I'll help——"

The steamship agent's nerves teetered on the edge of mirth, pity for, and wonder at this indomitable monomaniac. Then, with a queer feeling, Lassiter recalled how Birdsong had simply walked out into Madison Square and waited for a berth on the *Brazilian*—and it had come. Now he was just as simply lugging his Bibles to the brink of the precipice— However, there was this difference between the two events. In New York, Birdsong had one chance in about a million. Here, he had none at all.

He had no chance because the expedition had been stopped by the crater of a volcano. Not exactly a crater either, but the sides of a volcano whose top had crushed in some millions of years ago. The ruins of such cataclysms are fairly frequent in Ecuador. This one had left a vast circular hole in the earth which appeared to be about a mile or a mile and a quarter in depth and about eighteen or twenty miles in width.

In daylight it did not appear so enormous as at sunset, but Lassiter realized that at this hour it was really larger than it seemed. He judged it must be wider than the Grand Cañon, and perhaps deeper. It was huger than the crater of Kilauea in Hawaii because it was not a crater, but the circular ramparts of a volcano truncated by its summit crashing into its base. That long-gone catastrophe left a vast concavity, with walls five or six thousand feet high that leaned strongly inward. Into this impossible place, Birdsong expected to be translated.

The walls of this enormous barricade were colorful with a red cast that varied into grays and blues. And the vast circuit was molded into strange architectural shapes, something like the mesas of New Mexico and Utah.

Its bottom was lined with a verdure which showed vividly green, even from that great height. This green expanse was broken only in a place or two, and by a lake near the center of the volcano, and a stream that led away to its eastern side. No doubt, this lake, which slept so tranquilly in the heart of the great inclosure, furnished the steam, millions of years ago, which demolished one of the smoking Andes and left this splendid ruin in its stead.

Lassiter did not mention this probable geologic history to Birdsong, because he knew the colporteur would instantly affirm that that explosion æons ago had been staged for the express purpose of testing his, Ezekiel Birdsong's, faith in this day of grace.

And Lassiter knew if Birdsong said that, he would get angry and they would quarrel again.

The Stendill agent was just hefting the last pack to a tired shoulder when Nunes, who was walking about the rim, admiring the view below, paused, bent over, and after a moment called Lassiter to come there, that he had found some more rope of the Jivaros.

The financier veered and approached the spot with his last bundle. He laid it down wearily, wriggled his shoulder in relief and asked Nunes where. The Colombian pointed to a bit of the stuff just protruding over the inner scarp of the precipice.

The American was afraid to walk down and look at it, but he laid down on his stomach, told Nunes to hold his legs, and inched forward until his head protruded over the edge.

The vast depth, the lean of the wall on which he was poised gave Lassiter a swift sickening feeling of lurching forward in a mile-long plunge. He shut his eyes tightly, and drew a shivery breath, but for a full half a minute he could still feel himself falling inward with the swing of the wall. Presently he saw nothing except the red light filtering through his closed eyelids. He opened them in a tiny crack.

By eliminating the vastitude of the abyss, he overcame his sense of falling given by the concave walls. So he lay and looked with nerves more or less steady. To his surprize, then to his amazement, he saw that a strand of the Jivaros rope extended from the rim of the crater downward and inward for about a hundred and fifty feet and attached to one of the huge irregularities or folds in the stony circuit that gave the opposite side of the great palisades its peculiar sculptured appearance.

How the rope ever became connected between the two places, Lassiter could not imagine, because a plumb line would have missed the ledge below by a good fifty feet. Then he saw that the upper end of the rope, immediately under his eyes, was merely glued to the rocky face of the precipice.

Lassiter could scarcely believe his senses. To attach a rope to anything by gluing—it was fantastic. Yet, brief reflection told him this would be the only method of anchoring a line on bare stone. He reached down gingerly, and pulled at the rope. It was tightly drawn from point and his pull did not budge the glue in the slightest degree. Indeed, it held with the same sort of firmness as does a wire rope anchored in a suspension bridge. While Lassiter was making these investigations, Nunes drew him back by his legs. The promoter made no objections. In fact, he felt a sense of relief when good solid stone shut off the vertiginous depth beneath him.

Nunes pulled him in and asked anxiously, "Are you well, *señor?*"

"Yes, why?"

The fellow seemed shaken.

"I—I was talking to you, *señor*, and you did not answer—why, you are as white as a ghost. What did you see?"

"A rope."

"A rope! *Mio Dios*, is that all? Do you lie half an hour stretched out looking at a rope!"

"Half an hour—" Lassiter stared at the Colombian, then realized, with a queer sensation, that he had fainted.

V

EZEKIEL BIRDSONG'S second man-sized miracle, sent a certain thrill of conviction down Lassiter's spine. Against all probabilities, the colporteur had found a method of descent. It began really to look as if circumstance molded itself around the fellow's convenience. This upset the Stendill agent in an odd manner.

Indeed, one may generalize and say that miracles are abhorrent to humanity at large. The inexplicable wears a sinister countenance. It is abhorrent because a human being is essentially a calculating creature, and a miracle connotes an incalculable power. All primitive religious rites are efforts to placate that power to regularity.

Later human sophistication added a moral tinge to religion. That is to say, Man promises to exercise stability of character if he can rely upon the Deity to use the same self control. The relation thus becomes contractual and both parties are bound. By dint of setting a good example before Heaven, modern clergymen have almost entirely suppressed the miraculous. They have regularized the pantheon—almost.

At any rate they have been so successful that a certain school of men has sprung up who claim there never was and there never will be such a thing as a miracle. This, of course, is not only folly, it is ingratitude. They do not consider the trouble the sacerdotes have taken to suppress these aberrations.

These scientists claim to believe in law. Smite a scientist with a miracle and he clings with a sort of pathetic trust, that it all happened through law—an unknown law, that would work *ex post facto* if ever discovered. This, surely, is madness. Laws are not allowed to work *ex post facto;* the United States Supreme Court is very clear on that point.

Scientists may justly be called a sect of men exercising blind faith and wilful disregard of the truth against all the cañons of reason. Yet among them may be found many lovable and child-like characters.

However, Lassiter was not a scientist. He had no such sustaining faith in a mythical law. He was a hard-headed financial agent, a promoter, an opportunist, who seized on the passing face of circumstance and made the most of it. He acknowledged a miracle grudgingly when he saw one.

And this was a miracle, this rope leading down into emptiness. In an effort at rational explanation, his brain attacked the problem with rat-like persistence. Even if the rope had been of the most ordinary human origin, the probability that the expedition would have stumbled upon it was remote—but for a horseman to bring a lariat, glue it to the cliff and disappear thus leaving Birdsong a mode of descent——

Lassiter stared around the vast burnt pass up which he had clambered; the enormous scarp of the volcano became tinged with a nightmarish quality.

Ezekiel Birdsong, on the other hand, was not even curious about what his comrades were investigating. He accepted it as a matter of fact. He simply said to the Colombian—

"Praise the Lord, Brother Nunes, you've found the way down." Then he walked to the edge and sized up the situation from a mechanical point of view and said—

"We'll have to tie loops on these bundles and slide 'em down. I can't climb back for every pack."

Nunes and Birdsong cut up the harness of the dead mules to make traveling loops for the packs. Lassiter sat and smoked and tried to Euclidize the problem before him.

The man who killed their mules escaped by means of this rope. He did not use a flying-machine. The theory of a wonderfully advanced civilization was probably false.

The assailant probably came up out of the abyss—with his horse. Killed the mules and retreated back into it—with his horse? Was dragging a dead mule to the abyss—what for? Was mule an article of diet down there——?

The Stendill agent flung away his cigar. He was getting nowhere.

At this moment Nunes looked up from his work on the loops.

"I don't see how Señor Lassiter will climb down if the precipice gives him the vertigo?"

Mere thought of such a climb threw the promotor into a sort of panic. He began casting about for objections.

"How'll we get out after we get in?"

"Ride out, *señor*, just as the man did who killed our mules."

"Ride up this precipice?"

"*Señor*, you know the man did not ride out up this cliff. He came out by some trail to attack us, and slid down the rope quickly because I was firing at him."

This was a more nearly reasonable explanation than Lassiter's own.

"How did he know we were just here?"

"No doubt he saw our camp-fire last night."

Lassiter thought up another objection.

"I'm afraid that rope won't hold us. It's merely glued to the stone. That's all —a little pat of glue."

"You know, Brother Lassiter, it's bound to hold one man up, if it will lower a *gaucho* and his horse."

"But look here, Birdsong, how under high heaven could a man and a horse get down that rope?"

"Just leave that mystery to God, Brother Lassiter, and accept his blessings——"

"Confound it, we're leaving too many mysteries—this thing's getting on my nerves——"

He stood staring into the emptiness of the crater, and presently added—

"No man on earth could lower a horse a hundred-and-fifty feet without a derrick!"

"But, *señor*, we watched him do it—Ehue. If I live to get back to Quito it will be a proud day when I can say that I, Dom Pedro Balthasar Nunes, saw the King of the

Jivaros pick up his stallion by the horn of the saddle and lower it a hundred-and-fifty feet into a volcano."

Lassiter walked over and ventured to lie down on his stomach and peep over the ledge again. Once more the height made him feel squeamish, but he held his eyes resolutely to their task. To lower a horse to the ledge beneath him, even a derrick would have failed. It would have been necessary to swing the animal inward about fifty feet, land it with precision on a ledge too narrow for a horse's footing. And after that—what went with the horse?

Nobody went down into the abyss with a horse. Yet something had attacked their camp and had escaped down this rope. It had appeared to be a man on horseback. It had used a lariat.

If not a human being, then some monster, some devil, some centaur spawned in the Andes came up with ropes, with a swift and inscrutable method of inflicting death—His head ached with this endless, futile reasoning that went in circles and got nowhere.

THE Stendill agent lay on his belly and stared around at the encircling cliffs. They slept in the brilliant sunshine like some vast amphitheater awaiting the first movement of its tragic games.

Nunes also appeared to be thinking hard. He tied the loops with a preoccupied air and sat with head tilted to one side, so the smoke of his cigaret would not trail up into his eye, long after the fire had gone out. With the tying of the last loop, he threw away the stub, arose and cleared his throat a trifle self-consciously.

"Well, *señores*, my mules are dead."

Both Americans looked up at this unnecessary announcement.

"Yes, Brother Nunes?" interrogated Birdsong.

"So I suppose—since my mules are dead why—" he spread his hands and drew down his lips, Latin fashion—"I suppose you have no further use for me."

Lassiter was discomfited—

"Sure we will! We want you to go along. We can easily arrange a new salary basis."

"The harvest is white, Brother Nunes, but the laborers are few."

The Colombian did not look at his protesting friends, but brushed at a speck on his greasy green velvet jacket—

"I am a muleteer, Señor Birdsong, not a priest."

"But look here," put in Lassiter, "we need a cook——"

"Nor a cook."

"Then somebody to help with the packs."

"I am a muleteer, Señor Lassiter, not a mule."

"You are not going to turn back on us, Brother Nunes?"

"Well—*si*, Señor Birdsong." And after a moment's hesitation—"It does no good to give away the little books."

"That rests with God, Brother Nunes."

"*Si—certainemente*——"

There came a pause. Nunes stood frowning at the deserted tent and the dead mules.

"There is no way to carry on the books, Señor Birdsong, without the mules."

"We'll find more mules ahead, God willing, Brother Nunes. If we don't, I'll carry them pack by pack a hundred yards at a time until I have spread the blessed Word clear into Brazil."

Nunes nodded solemnly.

"*Si—si*—I have heard of saints, Señor Birdsong—the *padre* has told me of the blessed saints, but—I am a muleteer."

"So you will turn back, Brother Nunes?

"My mules are dead, Señor Birdsong."

The colporteur stood looking at the Colombian with his expressionless face.

"May the grace of God go with you, Brother Nunes, and may He keep watch over you! Now I'm going down, and I'll ask you to shoot down my packs, one by one, so I can get them off without tearing them."

"*Si, señor*, with all my heart!"

Nunes was evidently ashamed of himself, but when the muleteer cut himself off from the expedition, it occurred to Lassiter this was really the most sensible thing to do. The promoter was surprized he had not thought of it himself. So assuming a diplomatic manner he began:

"Look here, Birdsong, Nunes hasn't a bad idea. Why shouldn't all of us go back to Bujeos, fit out more mules and find a better route through the mountains?"

"He that putteth his hand to the plow and turneth back, Brother Lassiter——"

"Aw, here now—" the Stendill agent was annoyed at once at this Biblical quotation—"there's got to be some reason to this thing. We can go back, start over——"

"Brother Lassiter, do you suppose I'd let my Lord and Master stretch a miraculous rope down this bottomless pit for me, and then refuse to go down it? Ain't that a sign my work's down there?"

The Stendill agent made a gesture of protest.

"Our mules are dead."

"He slew our mules to try our faith, Brother Lassiter."

"A man in my business," said the promoter drily, "doesn't work by faith—he goes after what's in sight."

The colporteur considered him.

"Does that mean you are deserting God's cause, too, Brother Lassiter?"

The word "deserting" annoyed the New Yorker. It seemed ill-chosen and unnecessarily harsh.

"I don't think it wise to go on."

"The wisdom of men is foolishness with God, Brother Lassiter."

"I don't mind saying your plan looks like bally foolishness to me—relaying a lot of Bibles into Brazil— It's mad!"

The colporteur's hard-molded face betrayed neither pique nor regret. Lassiter felt uncomfortable under the stare of his wide-open black eyes. After a moment he arose, walked over to his clothes pack and got out a package of letters.

"Let us part friends, Brother Lassiter," he said in his perpetual even-tempered drawl. "If we part now, I don't believe we'll ever see each other again on this earth, but I hope I'll meet you in——"

"Yes, yes," interposed the promoter uncomfortably.

"I hope you don't mind taking these letters back to Guayquill with you, Brother Lassiter, and posting them to Mollie—" He handed over the pack. "Let's see, the postage will be thirty-four cents—" He reached in his pocket and drew out a greasy purse and started to count the exact change.

The Stendill agent made an annoyed gesture.

"For ——'s sake, Birdsong, put up your money—I swear, you have the least sense of proportion—I don't want you to pay me thirty-four cents!"

Birdsong handed over the bundle without further words. The letters evidently had been written at different times. The top one bore the address in almost illegible pencil writing—

Mrs. Mollie Birdsong (saved and sanctified) Birdsong, Ark.

Birdsong shook hands with the two men in a wooden way. Then he asked Nunes to hold his feet and lower him until he could reach down and catch the rope below the glue.

The Stendill agent watched the feat. Notwithstanding all the strange things that had come up on this journey, the lowering of Birdsong over the cliff was one of the most fantastic.

The colporteur was short and had to be lowered a long way. The two men worked with the nonchalance of steeple jacks. The saddle-colored Colombian, holding the heels of the Arkansan, inched him farther and farther over the brink. Birdsong's head, shoulders, then his whole torso sank out of sight. By this time Nunes was braced heavily to prevent his man from plunging a mile straight down.

"A leetle furder, Brother Nunes," drawled the colporteur.

"An inch more, *señor,*" squeezed out the Colombian in a strained voice, "and you'll pull loose!"

"An inch more, Brother Nunes. God'll strengthen yore grip."

Lassiter stared as the straining muleteer gave another inch. Sweat stood out on his face. Prickling sensations went up and down Lassiter's back. He wondered if the glue would hold——

"All right, Brother Nunes," came the drawl.

Next moment Ezekiel Birdsong vanished head foremost over the ledge.

As he went out of sight, the question formed in Lassiter's mind, how was it possible for that other man, the slayer of the mules, to reach the rope in black darkness, in a moment's time, if it required such exertions from two such athletes—it would require monkeyish activity—monkeyish—a new possibility flickered before Lassiter. Was the crater a land of great anthropoid apes—an ape on horseback—an ape that could make these strange lariats——

Every explanation that Lassiter could conjure up held a delirious quality. The breath of the ice fields high overhead breathed down on the brooding man. He shivered.

WHEN the Bible packs had been shot down to the Arkansan, Balthasar and Lassiter remained on the cliff, their labors at colporteurage come to an end. Neither of them peered over the cliff at the tiny ant-like figure toiling at the bundles far below them. But although he refused to look, Lassiter saw the little orange-striped man distinctly.

The men on the cliff avoided each other's eyes. Nunes rolled himself a shuck cigaret, then sat tapping and tapping it on his thumb nail. Lassiter drew out his pigskin case, and his fingers automatically went through the performance of choosing and applying a cigar to his lips, and lighting it. High overhead, about two-thirds of the height of the mountains, circled three or four black specks inspecting the motionless forms of the mules, and the equally motionless men.

The flavor of Lassiter's cigar reminded him of Birdsong's remark in Bryant Park that God did not like the odor of tobacco, that He preferred lilac, because Ezekiel and Mollie had been married under a lilac bush in Arkansas. How anthropomorphic!

The promoter visioned that marriage—the circuit rider in rusty black; the bride and groom with rustic finery concealing their vital bodies, while above and behind them glowed the lilac—a certain sense of futility, of emptiness, that comes at times to all unwed men, fell over the promoter.

Here he was, thirty-nine, sitting on this vast infernal lava drift, and there was not a person in the world to whom he could send letters, if he meditated plunging to destruction, except his resignation to M. L. N. Morrow. Perhaps he ought to have married one of the stenographers——

And he was soft, with a core-reaching softness that comes of thirteen years at paper work. He was so soft that he was allowing a fanatical colporteur to scramble down alone into an extinct volcano, along sinister ropes, toward a murderous agency that inflicted death in the most mysterious manner, that dragged dead mules and vanished down enormous cliffs at midnight—and this colporteur was a kind of friend, too; crude and annoying, but still a friend—so this was the knight errant, the adventurer, who, thirteen years ago had entered the Stendill offices seeking romance! This deserter.

Lassiter tossed away his cigar and arose.

"Balthasar," he said briskly, "I think I've made a business mistake. I've really got to go down—" he flipped his thumb toward the chasm—"after all. Pure business with me—"

The promoter hesitated. The saddle-colored green jacket sat appraising him. After a moment Lassiter went on:

"I'm going to tell you why I came out here—I'm looking for locations to open supply depots for airships."

Balthasar nodded casually—

"Airships——"

"Yes, did you think I was a muleteer?"

"No, *absolutemente*—I wondered——"

"Well, that's it, and it just struck me that this crater would make a wonderful hangar and tourist depot. No heavy winds can strike a ship down there. The place is large enough to maneuver in. It is one of the most magnificent scenes to be found on earth——"

Balthasar nodded soberly:

"*Si, señor,* I have been thinking about Señor Birdsong, too. I am like you, *señor;* never before did Dom Pedro Balthasar Nunes desert his *camarado* for man or devil."

The promoter was faintly piqued when he saw the Colombian placed no credence in his account of the aviation project. However that was of no moment; Lassiter set about getting certain belongings of his down the rope; then he would rejoin his fellow adventurer. He shouted this news down to Birdsong. From far below he heard an indistinct—

"Praise the Lord."

NUNES contrived a sort of ship's ladder made out of harness to get the Stendill agent over the lip of the precipice to the rope. Then the Colombian put loops around Lassiter's chest and knees and looped him to the line as if he had been another bundle. He fixed leather guards for Lassiter's hands and showed him how to hold the rope. Lassiter backed down to the ladder, and by looking carefully at the pat of glue, kept his head.

Then he loosed the little companionway, and the glue and cliff rushed upward pulling a long silky rope through his hands. It seemed to Lassiter he was descending with the speed of a free fall. The little ledge sprung at him and struck him a jarring blow. He sat there, tied to his rope, jolted and somewhat stunned until Birdsong loosed him.

Nunes sailed down as gracefully as a swallow. He held the rope with his legs and one hand while he waved his sombrero with the other. Birdsong took occasion to speak a word of warning about "the filthy vanity of the flesh."

For some queer reason this stricture rather pleased both the friends. They were warm from the glow of self-sacrifice.

Birdsong had cached all his Bibles except one pack. Now he chose two more packs, a little one for Lassiter. The caching was simple, a mere piling of the books in the *cavetto* of this vast entablature that ringed a twenty-mile circumference.* There was no danger to the Bibles from rain or snow on account of the overhang.

Lassiter hefted his pack, got it on to his shoulder and moved tentatively down the ledge he had seen from the rim.

It was considerably wider than he had thought, and it caused him to renew his speculation concerning the possibility of landing a horse on its surface. The horse might have stuck, but the question arose why any one would want a horse in such a place. It did not seem to be a road down after all. Lassiter was forced to walk with his pack of Bibles on his outer shoulder, and to hold on to the cusps, or air pockets, in the outsweep of lava above his head. The ledge dwindled to a shelf, and after forty or fifty yards, the shelf became a mere wrinkle in the face of the mile-high wall.

It occurred to Lassiter, as he inched along that this little fold could very well slant back up the *cavetto*, or turn straight down, or tail out to nothing in the vast concavity. He had assumed, since a rope led to it, that it was a path down. But as the way grew less and less practicable, he realized that he was down there, and he could never reclimb that hundred and fifty feet of rope and regain the rim.

His fingers grew tired of clinging to the abrasive lava, and sore. If the thing that attacked the camp were a monkey, how could three men with packs hope to duplicate its simian descent? A kind of amazement grew in Lassiter that he had followed Birdsong so rashly. On the heels of his amazement followed the repentance of a man who has committed a generous, impulsive act.

There is a *cliché* current in moralistic circles that no one ever regrets an unselfish act. In reality few deeds bring more bitter penitence. When a man acts selfishly and loses, he has the consolation of knowing he did the best he could for himself.

It was a mistake of the head, not of the heart. But when he acts charitably, he is nearly always motived by some unaccustomed impulse that springs abruptly into action, moves him to some rash goodness, then cooling, leaves its victim to meditation and remorse.

So Lassiter crept along, abusing himself for having wandered into this vertical *cul de sac*, for marooning himself, on the face of a gigantic cliff. Birdsong on the other hand footed the wrinkle with entire self-confidence. And even that displeased Lassiter. Why had he followed such a goatish fellow? So profound was his disgust, it actually tickled his pneumogastric nerve into the first faint flutterings of nausea.

Around a turn in the precipice, sure enough, the unevenness they followed smoothed out, but at its end, another silken rope dropped to a thread-like walkway sixty or seventy feet below. It became evident, after all, they were following a hazardous, but defined trail down this mile of concavity.

The two men passed their packs to Birdsong, who shot them down, then the colporteur went; Nunes strapped on Lassiter's loops, and the promoter followed the missionary. After them came Nunes with a flourish.

Along this crease Lassiter was forced to lift his inner foot high and bend his knee outward before it had room to pass between his outer leg and the cliff. His Bible pack raked the wall and pressed him gently outward.

The Stendill agent kept his eyes rigidly on his footing, its ups and downs, and inequalities. He tried to receive no impression of the landscape far below him.

But he could not avoid sensing the illumination of his situation. The cliff that swung out over his head shut off all sunshine, but a strong greenish reflection beat up from the landscape below on the under side of the cliff. It poured up through his legs. He could see it shining under the brim of his sombrero.

No matter how rigidly he avoided seeing the landscape, that up-beating brilliance registered the enormousness of his height in every nerve of his body. He could feel the chasm in the calves of his legs, along the inner sides of his arms, in his diaphragm. He could imagine himself falling—falling interminably down this abyss of light. His head felt queer.

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* The circumference of the truncated volcano, Motobatl, is twenty-two miles and one hundred and seventy yards at the rim, north and south, and three hundred yards less than that figure, east and west. At its base it is exactly twenty-four miles north and south; twenty-three, two hundred and thirty east and west. Mr. Lassiter's descriptions are necessarily impressionistic. This and other corrections are made in no spirit of captiousness, but merely to give any interested reader or traveler correct details.

He was not sure whether his fingers had found a cusp and were holding to the cliff. It came to him as a sort of discovery that he had stopped climbing and was standing unsteadily clinging to something. His hands and feet seemed detached, and a long way from him.

Then he heard Nunes and Birdsong shouting from vast distances. Birdsong's voice said:

"Take his pack, brother Nunes, and lean him right forward on mine—Lemme run my right arm through that loop—all right, careful now—If anything happens to us, brother Nunes, I hope I'll meet you up yonder where they ain't no more sorrow nor troub——"

* * *

SYNCOPE produces no perceptible hiatus in the flow of consciousness, merely a jump, a dislocation, a picking up of ordered impressions out of nowhere.

When Lassiter regained his senses, he discovered first that the temperature had greatly increased. When he gained a little more concentration, he saw he was far down the side of the cliff, and the flat green at the bottom of the crater had resolved itself into the crests of trees with cultivated plots up near the northern half of the circle. The lake near the center of the vast amphitheater was of considerable size and lay beneath him, as blue as sapphire.

Birdsong arose from where he sat and was about to pick the promoter up again when he saw Lassiter's eyes were open.

"Are you all right?" he asked cordially.

The Stendill agent was thoroughly ashamed. He got himself weakly together.

"This is a —— of a stroke I pulled," he said in a sick man's aspirate.

"You'll be O. K. pretty soon. Not so high here."

"Don't see how you ever got me down?"

"I never could have, Brother Lassiter, if the Lord hadn't strengthened my arm, bless His holy name!"

Lassiter looked up. He had evidently been shot down a tremendously long silken rope that had landed him here. He was now at the top of the detritus that had fallen from the overhang and the going from there down was rough but not dangerous. He picked himself up presently and started shakily down through the huge boulders.

The three men disturbed an eagle nesting among the stones. The great bird launched itself into space with a whistling of feathers and flapped with slow strokes through the diamond-like sunshine toward the forest below. A few hundred feet down, they observed two young vicunas playing among the cliffs. Later, they stopped at a spring set with ferns and drank.

They were just climbing down into a subtropical country. After the bleak Andean scenery this kindliness of nature was as grateful as sunshine to beggars.

Lassiter's spirits began to revive. The commercial possibilities of the situation impressed him. Here were the temperature, the sunshine and glamour of the Riviera in an Alpine setting. Almost involuntarily he began projecting a tourist folder describing the place. He could see a clump of royal palms on the southern edge of the lake that would make a good picture.

On the front of his folder, he would have a picture in color showing the great reddish height of the volcano's wall with mountain peaks towering above its rim. The beauty and vastness of his surroundings went through his nerves like a cold wind, and yet at the same time he continued thinking of his brochure. He thought of it just as an artist thinks pictures when looking upon magnificence. It was his profession. He would call it, "See the Riviera in the Andes."

Lassiter surveyed the scene with a sort of exaltation. Out near that lake he would construct an enormous tourist hotel. There would be sailing and fishing on its waters. Golf links would ring its blue expanse. A motor drive would follow the sixty-mile circuit of the cliffs——

By this time they were approaching the sunshine that lay beyond the shadow of the overhang. Birdsong and Lassiter were abreast with Nunes a little distance ahead.

Birdsong walked so sturdily and was so much shorter than Lassiter that the promoter felt a return of shame that he had forced this little man to carry him down the cliff.

"How far did you pack me, Birdsong?" he asked after a moment.

"Not far, Brother Lassiter, from about right up there—" he pointed at a distant indeterminate spot in the towering cliffs—"to about there"—the top of the detritus.

The promoter stared up and shivered.

Birdsong noted the rigor and proceeded in his nasal drawl:

"Why don't you make ready to meet your God, Brother Lassiter? You're a sinner and you know it."

Lassiter looked around impatiently at the question. Birdsong continued:

"The only sure thing in life is death, Brother Lassiter. All of us has got to die. Your time may come before morning; hadn't you better get ready to meet your Maker?"

It annoyed Lassiter to have Birdsong talking of death. Death, whose black robes he had brushed half an hour ago, had again withdrawn itself to a respectful distance. In his heart, Lassiter felt that death would show a certain consideration for the worth and consequence of Charles Lassiter. Death would come at the end of a long and useful life. It was crude of Birdsong to bring up such a remote unpleasantness. So he changed the subject by asking—

"What is that droning sound, bees?"

Birdsong listened.

"It sounds like Mollie spinning."

They were rounding a huge fallen boulder. Nunes, who was in front, came to a stop just beyond the obstruction. With a gesture he drew the attention of his comrades.

ABOUT fifty feet down the slope, among a scarlet grouping of poinsettias stood a vast brown man. His back was to the trio.

His huge tun of a body had the humpbacked look characteristic of the exceedingly obese. He had no neck. A great head fitted down into an expanse of shoulders. His straight black hair was done up into a sort of knot on top of his head, and was decorated with a blue heron feather.

At first he seemed to wear no clothes, but as he made certain bending movements in his work, a breech clout became visible among the rolls of flesh about his hips and buttocks. The invisible clout, quipa-palm sandals and the feather formed his raiment.

He sweated prodigiously. Drops of sweat trickled down his brown bulk as if he stood under an invisible fountain. In the brilliant sunshine these trickling drops gave him the appearance of being sequined with moving jewels. When he bent his arms, his elbows were but the gentlest of curves.

The colossus was engaged in an operation as delicate as he was gross. He was tying, or rather sticking, a long glistening cord from one flaming poinsettia to another. He had quite a network. Among the flowers droned dozens of humming birds. They made a blur of color moving about among the scarlet racemes.

While the men stared, one of these living jewels settled on a cord to rest. It stuck. The fat man waddled to it and picked off the little captive before it had time to gum its wings. He bit off its head. Then he pressed in his abdomen with a grunt, stooped and laid the beheaded bird in a basket. The basket glowed with other humming birds. It was half full. Its brilliancy was greater than that of jewels.

As the mammoth straightened, he caught a side glimpse of his audience. He came to a stand, took four paddling steps to turn his bulk and face his observers.

The eyes that regarded Lassiter were shining black slits in a rolling brown expanse. His jowls spread out over his chest. Yet with it all there was a poise, a dignity about the naked brown man as ponderous as his corpus.

Nunes removed his sombrero and began in his usual Quichua:

"*Señor*, you see before you three almsmen of God, not priests but honest thieves who come begging you to receive a little book of miraculous virtues. This holy book is good for aches, wounds, sores, scalds, boils, ulcers, carbuncles, the dengue, marasmus and the calentures. A tea made from its leaves removes the discomforts of pregnant women. Balky donkeys have been known to labor willingly when the dust off of this sacred volume was blown into their ears. A long drought was miraculously broken by——"

There was much more to Nunes' oration and the vast man heard it to the end with a mountain-like patience. When the Colombian came to a definite stop, the behemoth disregarded it all with a completeness that was droll and turned to Lassiter.

"Where did you men come from?" he asked in a queer sort of Quichua.

"From over the rim, *señor*," Lassiter made an upward gesture.

The colossus nodded—

"A man came over the rim once before, *señor*; no doubt he was a kinsman of yours."

Lassiter was amazed at this deduction and was about to answer when the giant proceeded in his purring baritone—

"He was pale, like you, a kinsman, no doubt——"

Again Lassiter started to demur, but the purr wandered on:

"No doubt he was your kinsman, and that you are now searching for your kinspeople here in Motobatl. I am sorry to say, *señor*, you will find few of your kinspeople left. There is only your kinsman's great grandson, a great granddaughter, your eighth cousin; his third nephew once crossed, your seventh cousin twice removed; his great niece, Prymoxl, who, poor woman is now heavy and sad with her sixteenth child, and there is Prymoxl's daughter, Tilita, your seventh prima—if you will follow me, I will show them all to you and allow you to hold long conversations with your kinsfolk. Just follow me."

Here the vast man lifted his voice and called—

"Quiz-Quiz!"

A little hunchbacked Indian came out of a tangle of flowers, where he had evidently been asleep.

"Bring my basket."

Then, with a sort of elephantine courtesy he motioned the men to follow him and moved off through the poinsettias into a park of tropical trees.

This deluge of genealogy left Lassiter entirely at loss. It was too detailed for a sweeping denial. Then a thought crossed his mind that perhaps there was some covert reason why he would do well to enter this strange place as a kinsman. If they were the Jivaros, being kin might save him from being cooked. He could make nothing at all of it. Finally, he said tentatively, over the dripping brown shoulder, as a sort of straw to test the wind:

"I'm afraid I shan't have time to see so many kinsmen. Tomorrow, I go on east into Brazil."

The behemoth honored this communication by stopping dead still, making six rotating shuffles and facing the New Yorker.

"Go east?"

"Yes, *señor*."

"Out of Motobatl?"

"Into Brazil, *señor*."

The colossus stood staring at Lassiter out of an impassive face. After several moments he said:

"You are indeed a kinsman of that ancient man who came into Motobatl—one-hundred-and-ninety-seven years ago. He too, desired to get out of Motobatl. I have his whole story knotted into a quippus by my great grandfather, Gogoma, whose name I have the honor to bear."

Here he made a slight bulbous bow.

"My great grandfather gave your great grandfather thirty-three strands from the center of the web of the Sun in order that your great grandfather might lime eagles and fly out of Motobatl. Your great grandfather limed eagles for five years. He was a joyful man during those years, so says the quippus, and when he captured an eagle, he would come to my great grandfather and say, 'Holy Gogoma, I am a happy mortal, I am another eagle nearer home.'

"In five years he caught twelve. Then he bade my grandfather adieu, took his eagles up to a high cliff and leaped off. But the eagles struggled in different directions, and your grandfather fell and was dashed to pieces. That is why he never returned to his people, and why you are here."

During this grotesque recital, the modern Gogoma panted heavily ahead, sweating profusely. Whether the whole anecdote were concocted for the occasion or not, Lassiter did not know, but it expressed an alarming state of fact—or fiction.

"Do you mean, *señor*," he asked blankly, "that there is no way out of Motobatl?"

"There has not been, *señor*," purred the fat man casually, "since the priests carved the temple of the Sun. How warm it is today."

VI

IT REQUIRED ten, perhaps twelve, minutes for Gogoma's information that no man had ever escaped from Motobatl really to register on Lassiter. A sort of shocked questioning formed in the New Yorker's mind. He felt he had not heard distinctly.

"No man ever got out?"

"Your kinsman failed, *señor*."

"And no one else tried?"

"No one."

Lassiter stared at the head set down in the immense shoulders. The promoter drew in a breath to ask if there were any way to communicate with New York. The query was too idle. He let the air out softly.

The ponderous brown man waddled on into a grove of immense trees. It was really a jungle partially cleared of undergrowth. In some places were park-like clearances canopied with leaves, hung with lianas and columned by those huge and grotesque boles into which trees contort when forced by the perpetual stimulus of an equatorial sun.

Here a paddlewood flung out radial buttresses twenty or thirty feet from the huge core of the tree. There a kind of palm piled up a series of swollen nodules. A banyan drove a hundred piles into the earth; a ceiba flung out a hollow circle of wood that preempted the space of a city lot. A hot, green smell filled the air, bird shrieks and the whine of insects. Gnats flew into Gogoma and drowned themselves.

For about an hour the great fleshy blob of a man led the way among the foot paths and at last paused before a huge tree so much like a baobab that Lassiter believed it to be one. The vegetation about the tree was worn smooth, and a kind of mud oven stood to one side. Red peppers and some big drying calabashes were hung up on the outside.

The place smelled of garlic. A fairly large hole, squared into a door by human labor led into the hollow trunk. Gogoma drummed on this entrance and waited. Came a shuffling from the interior and a moment later a baggy old woman appeared in the opening.

Gogoma made a gesture of salutation; the fat of his arm swayed and dripped.

"A kinsman of yours, Prymoxl. He has come to inquire about your grandfather, who was his great-grandfather."

"A kinsman—" She looked at Lassiter out of rather fine old eyes set in a sadly withered face.

"A cousin of yours, your *primo*."

"How did he get here?"

"Over the cliff, as your grandfather came, Prymoxl, and he already speaks of going back as your grandfather spoke—you can talk to him yourself. I commend him to your care."

The woman approached Lassiter curiously, and when she came quite close, he saw, after all, she was not aged. She had the withered sagginess of women whom the tropic sun has forced into intense fruition, and swifter caducity. Indeed, in her decay, she retained traces of her fugitive blossoming.

Her eyes were finely set; her ears maintained their delicacy of design; her hair was more finely spun than that of the unmixed Indians. All this, no doubt, harked back to that Spanish ancestor who dropped by a miracle into Motobatl a hundred and fifty years ago, and today gave Lassiter a spurious claim to her kinship.

The old woman shrugged as Lassiter appraised her shapelessness.

"I am afraid, *señor*, you will find little of your blood in my veins."

"Kinship lies in the heart, *señora*," flattered the agent of the Stendill lines.

It pleased her.

"I am a Spaniard here." She tapped her withered breast. "Do you see in me the sister you seek, *primo* (cousin)?"

There was a kind of raillery in her cackle.

"I only hope I am not disappointing, *señora*."

The old crone quacked in laughter, came closer with that familiarity a sense of kinship lends, seized his arm and drew it about her waist.

"Behold us, Gogoma," she paraded in ironic gaiety, "brother and sister from a line of brave men and beautiful *señoras!*"

She shook with laughter at her own satire, and the American perceived with surprize that his shapeless companion was again about to become a mother.

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, Sister Prymoxl," quoted Birdsong with comforting intent.

The old baggage ceased laughing abruptly at this kindly meant apology for her ugliness.

"*Primo*, your *criado* (servant) is insolent."

Gogoma smoothed her temper over with a massive gesture.

"I begged you to preserve your wonderful beauty, Prymoxl, just as I ask you to preserve Tilita's loveliness. She is as like her beautiful grandmother as two tamarinds——"

He wagged his fat jowls and said in a different key:

"What I came for, *señora*, was to show you your kinsmen. I have them a sleeping place, and you can send their fare."

The crone turned with the duty of a kinswoman in her manner.

"Surely, *señores*, my daughter Tilita will bring your *cena* (supper)."

Lassiter began the usual protest; Prymoxl smothered it with the usual generosity. It was no trouble. The pot was boiling. Tilita would be curious to see her fair, tall kinsman. She would need some excuse for coming to see the *señores*. She was a pretty child, quite a woman——

"How many children have you, *señora?*"

She cast up her fine black eyes at the leaves and fell into a calculation. After some computing and silent nods of the head, she said—

"This will be my sixteenth, *señor*."

Lassiter did a little problem of his own. She had been married sixteen years. So she was thirty or thirty-one years old—this ancient creature, while he, Lassiter, her youthful kinsboy, was thirty-nine. There was something grotesque about it. To say something he asked—

"Do they all live with you, *señora?*"

"Only one is here in Motobatl, *primo*."

The agent dropped his small talk and became alert. "Where do the others live?"

"My others—my thirteen—" the hag glanced at Gogoma, then raised her eyes to the glitter of light high up in the baobab top—"why my fourteen little ones are in the sun, *primo*."

"The sun," repeated Lassiter blankly.

"*Si, primo,* my fourteen *niñas* (babies) are in the sun."

This queer statement left the promoter out of the small change of conversation. He couldn't get his mind back to trifles. Gogoma told the hag where he meant to bed his guests, and the four men presently made their adieus.

THE place Gogoma had in mind proved to be a paddlewood tree not far from Prymoxl's abode. Its radial buttresses looked like a dark cone spread under a cloud of verdure. Nearer they saw that thin partitions divided the space around the trunk into eight triangular cubicles. Gogoma evidently had passed word by the hunchback of the newcomers' arrival, for these cubicles were already furnished.

Mats of yellow nipa cloth were over the earthen floors. Jars carved out of the porous lava sat full of water, and a slow transpiration kept the liquid chilled. Hammocks swung across the acute interior angles of the triangles.

Overhead, on top of the thin buttresses, stretched another roll of matting that could be loosed by pulling a string and would roll down and form a roof. Even a jar of flowers, on a little table, garnished each of these *al fresco* apartments. The whole ensemble held a Japanese simplicity and charm.

Gogoma introduced his guests to their compartments with much polite quivering on his part and many protests of satisfaction on theirs, and presently took himself off, looking like nothing so much as a huge jelly man that had spewed out of the taproot of some tree in this fantastic forest.

The Stendill agent chose the cubicle on the western side of the tree in order not to be awakened by the morning sun. Birdsong and Nunes piled their Bible packs in the colporteur's cubicle which lay toward the south.

As Lassiter made his little house-keeping arrangements, he could hear his companions talking through the thin partitions.

They were discussing whether Gogoma was the man who had killed their mules. The Colombian thought he was, and that he had said there was no way out of the crater in order to prove an alibi. Birdsong thought that Gogoma may have been miraculously translated to the rim to slay the mules in order to bring down the blessings of the gospel on Motobatl. Nunes cleared his throat at this. Birdsong inquired rather sharply if he doubted God could perform this miracle.

"No doubt He could," agreed the Colombian after a pause, "but it is easier for me to believe the old yellow bag's a liar. You see, Señor Birdsong," he added apologetically, "I've seen so many more liars than I have miracles."

"Then how did Gogoma get down that cliff right under our eyes, with his horse too?"

This rather empty discussion was interrupted by a girl coming through the forest with a platter balanced on her head. It sat her polished black hair without assistance from her hands, which were engaged with two jars. The thing most observable from a distance was the grace of her carriage, and a tight-fitting bodice of such luminous green that it seemed it must originate its own brilliance.

Closer, the Stendill agent saw that her face was of the vivid Spanish type, a sallow paleness against jet hair. Her cheek bones were rather high, and her lips were as scarlet and her eyes as black as her jacket was luminous.

Lassiter got up out of his hammock, knowing quite well it was Prymoxl's daughter, and annoyed with himself because he had forgot her name. He stood on the nipa mat, thinking hard, trying not to subject the girl to the slight inhospitality of having to make herself known, when Nunes came out of the southern cubicle making a deep bow.

"Señorita Tilita," he gushed, "allow me to present my fortunate comrades, Señor Don Carlos Lassiter, Señor Don Ezekiel Birdsong, and lastly, your servant, Dom Pedro Porforio Balthasar Nunes, late muleteer of Quito, now by the grace of the Virgin, a fellow citizen of Motobatl with yourself—allow me to relieve your burden."

He was quite close to her when he finished this harangue, replaced his sombrero and lifted the platter from her head.

The girl seemed rather abashed at such an ornate introduction. She said simply:

"I am Tilita—"

Then glancing from one to the other, she asked of Lassiter—

"Are you my kinsman, *señor?*"

Nunes laughed:

"No, *señorita*, this *caballero* has not a drop of Spanish blood in his veins. Now I am of Castillian descent, I am your real——"

It had been Lassiter's intention all along to disaffirm the extraordinary kinship thrust upon him by Gogoma. This seemed a most natural opportunity. Therefore, he rather surprized himself a moment later by bending over the girl's hand, pressing it warmly and saying—

"I cannot express how pleased I am to greet my *prima.*"

When Birdsong was presented he greeted her as "sister Tilita," so the girl must have received a mixed idea of her relationship.

THE *mestizo* girl placed her platter on the little table in Lassiter's cubicle, and the three men sat on the nipa rug eastern fashion. The *plat du jour* was a baked fish garnished with some sort of transparent red berries of just the required sourness. Maize bread accompanied the fish. Around this were grouped tamarinds, kumquats, bread fruit, melons and a jar of cow-tree juice, that queer sap that reproduces exactly a very rich dairy milk.

It was Tilita's task to collect this sap for seven families living near Prymoxl's baobab. Bearing jars of *arbol de vaca* sap on her head had given the girl her splendid fluent walk.

"Where are the cow-trees?" inquired Lassiter.

"Down by the lake, *primo*, near the web of the sun."

"What is that?" inquired the promoter curiously.

"The place of sacrifice to the sun, *primo.*"

Lassiter paused in peeling a tamarind with an odd sense of pleasure in the fact that this vivid girl worshiped the sun. The faith seemed to complement her shining green jacket which was made of featherwork.

Birdsong put down a calabash of cow-tree milk and straightened.

"Sister Tilita," he began in his solemn drawl, "I hope you do not offer sacrifices to the sun——"

The girl's dark eyes widened.

"*Señor*, I could not refuse my gifts and prayers to one who gives me life and food and warmth——"

Birdsong arose.

"My dear sister," he cried, "the true God has sent you a messenger—just wait a moment——" He turned and started for his own cubicle.

This turn of affairs disturbed Lassiter oddly. He got to his feet with a word of excuse to his hostess and followed the colporteur. He found him getting into his Bible packs. The Stendill agent stood by, a little at loss what he wanted to do. He cleared his throat and began uncertainly—

"Eh—Birdsong, don't you think we'd better go over this matter carefully before beginning your work?"

The colporteur looked up at him astonished.

"You!"

"Y-Yes, don't you think we'd better plan this carefully before starting our actual missionary campaign?"

"That's not what Philip told the Ethiopian, Brother Lassiter."

"Perhaps not. I—I don't exactly recall what Philip did tell the Ethiopian, but this Tilita is a girl. She might get a garbled account of what you tell her, spread it and prejudice a great many important persons against the true religion to start with."

"The Good Book says a little child shall lead them, Brother Lassiter."

"Yes, yes, that may be true," agreed the promoter, annoyed by the ease with which Birdsong sniped him with these quotations, "but doesn't it say—lemme see, doesn't it say something about taking counsel together—" He looked appealingly to Birdsong to pilot him through unfamiliar waters.

The colporteur hesitated—

"Well, the Bible does say take ye counsel one with another—" he laid down his packs uncertainly— "I want to do what's right, Brother Lassiter."

The Stendill agent drew a breath of relief—

"I know you do, Birdsong—so do I," he added as an afterthought.

Charles Lassiter was surprized at the sudden opposition that had risen up in him against Birdsong's attack on the girl's faith. In reality, it was the artist in the promoter striving to prevent Birdsong from spoiling the picture. The thought of this warm, vivid girl kneeling to a tropical sun was a harmony in violent values. It warmed Lassiter's heart like a draft of rum.

As the two returned empty-handed to the dinner, Lassiter was saying a little haphazardly—

"We'll go over these plans carefully—this is a day of specialization—want to make a success——"

As they walked into the western cubicle, Nunes was showing the girl the withered spot on his neck and was saying:

"—and my dying thought, *señorita,* was that a beautiful *arbol-de-vaca* gatherer was stooping over me, lifting me, pressing me to her bosom with fiery kisses when my —— *camarado* beat off the vampire with a club and saved my life!"

Tilita shivered and touched the withered spot with the tip of her finger.

"How fortunate for you, *señor!*"

"Fortunate! Fortunate!" cried Balthasar, leaning toward her. "*Señorita,* to continue such a dream of such a girl, I would give the vampire the last drop of my blood. I never forgave my *camarado* for waking me. I wish now some vampire——"

"Oh, *señor!*"

"Indeed I do!"

Tilita's face was flushed when the Americans interrupted the *tête-à-tête.* A little later the girl took her platter and jars to go home. Balthasar sprang up and relieved her of all her burdens and went with her.

Lassiter watched them walk away with clear-cut distaste. It seemed odd that the girl did not see through the absurdity of Balthasar's tales and the grossness of his flattery. He attributed to the girl his own sensitiveness. In fact, a man always sees a reflection of his own qualities in any woman he admires. A man's love is about two-thirds self-esteem.

The satisfying dinner and the hush of noon sent the promoter back to his cubicle and into his hammock. Lassiter had been too long in South America not to have adopted the luxury of the siesta.

When he returned into the hammock he saw the hooks were of silver, and the ropes of the same silken colloidal material that was used by their assailant on the rim of the abyss. Another cord of the same stuff was attached to the bole of the tree. He was to use this to swing himself. He took it and began to oscillate gently.

He meant to think out the endless conundrums his situation imposed upon him. —Where were Prymoxl's fourteen children? —Had Gogoma or any of his men climbed up on the cliff to slay their mules?—All of this suggested there was a secret road out of Motobatl.—He was vaguely ashamed of having stopped Birdsong in his effort to proselyte Tilita.—He yawned.—If there were no escape from Motobatl, such a girl as Tilita would greatly ameliorate the——

Overhead stretched the green gloom of the paddlewood, through which penetrated a ray or two of noon-tide fulgor. He stared hazily up into the green caverns. The leaves nearest him were green-black against luminous yellow-greens farther aloft.

An insect hummed somewhere, and presently he saw it above him. It was a steely blue fly that poised so steadily he could see the articulations between its head and thorax and abdomen. It lowered itself very gently until it touched a tassel of the hammock spread over Lassiter's breast. Then it flashed upward with a zing, as if the devil of insects had pounced at it. This odd play aroused a sleepy curiosity in Lassiter's mind. This changed to a thought of Tilita kneeling to the sun. Next moment he slept.

WHEN the promoter awoke, the sun was deep in the west. Weariness from his climb and a good dinner had kept him asleep longer than usual. He turned out briskly, with an odd sense of having some sort of engagement. He washed his head and neck in the water and arranged his tie by peering down at his reflection in the jar. He was meticulous with the tie. A little later he set out at a brisk stride toward old Prymoxl's baobab.

When he came in sight of the crone, she was sitting in front of her tree home with a mass of vicuna wool under her arm, spinning it into thread. She worked automatically with her eyes fixed in the direction of the declining sun. Lassiter was quite upon her before she observed his coming. Then she turned with a little start out of some reverie.

"Ah, *primo*," she mumbled, "it is you."

"Are you alone, *señora?*"

"Oh, no, *primo*, I was just watching my *niñas* go to rest."

"Your *niñas?*"

"My fourteen."

"I thought they had gone——"

"They are in the sun, *primo*." She fixed her eyes on the sunset again. "I know they are signaling to me now with their little hands."

As Lassiter listened, the old woman's faith translated itself into his sympathy. She was really watching her fourteen children sink to rest in a world of gold. They were as real to her as his own person standing beside her. He started to ask her how they had died when she continued:

"I am an old woman, *primo*, and my beauty has gone, but I had no heart. Sunrise and sunset meant nothing to me until my *niñas* were taken from me."

There came a pause. In his heart, Lassiter was surprized and moved at the naturalness and simplicity of the old crone's faith. It seemed neither strange nor exotic, but a most natural tenet for so simple a soul. Presently he inquired the way to the *arbol de vaca* forest. Prymoxl pointed the path toward the lake and returned to her maternal brooding on the sunset. Lassiter walked on quickly, and with a certain sense of buoyancy and pleasure that was unwonted.

Within half an hour the American had reached the lake, a considerable expanse of water with three or four reedy islands dotting its surface. Far down the lake one of those reed boats, or *bolsas*, such as Lassiter had seen on Lake Titicaca, trailed a long golden "V" across the purple mirror. In the sunset, the naked torso of the fisherman looked like a little copper figure leaning back and forth at the oars.

Toward the extreme east, the lake narrowed to a stream and flowed apparently straight into the eastern escarpment of the crater.

The whole scene, the lake, the duplication in its depth of the encircling palisades, and the glittering peaks beyond, brought the promoter a keen sense of his own frustration. What an ironic end for his expedition—imprisoned by the magnificence he sought!

A point of royal palms extended from the forest to the water's edge some little distance down the beach, and Lassiter strolled toward them, attracted by the nervous beauty of the trees. When he rounded this point, he saw straight on ahead of him, carved in the face of the eastern rampart, the façade of an enormous temple.

He stood looking at it quite astounded. It was the *teocalla*, the temple of the sun, of which Gogoma had spoken. The whole mile-high cliff had been wrought into a vast columniation, crowned by an immense entablature. The natural stripe in the crater had been seized on by the architect and carved into a frieze of colossal proportions.

The interior of the cliff evidently had been hollowed by immense labors because the façade was penetrated by circular-rayed windows, thus introducing the sun motif into architecture. Between the vast columns arose a maze of heroic figures, foliage, geometrical designs in high relief. It reminded Lassiter of the triumphal sculpture on the heights of Baghistan in Persia, or the cavern temples of Elephanta in Bombay harbor. However, this was on a mightier scale than those heroic works.

Only when Lassiter moved toward the hypogeum did he fully realize its dimensions. He was more than a mile distant, yet the vast façade seemed to tower over his head. It arose in the sunset, a golden miracle. As he moved toward it, his utter inability to exploit this wonder in the currents of world travel filled him with gall. It sickened him. Right before his eyes stood the coup of all modern tourist agencies.

It meant millions, ease, luxury— The promoter flung out his arms in a kind of rage at his own helplessness— If he could just get one word to New York— He blew out his breath like a sick man and stood staring at the vast temple with a sagging face.[*]

PRESENTLY he became aware that some one was walking down the sand behind him. He turned and saw Balthasar Nunes and Tilita leading a young vicuna lamb by a cord. The girl evidently had seen Lassiter's gesture and heard his groan, for she called in a concerned voice—

"*Primo*, what is the matter?"

Only after several moments did the promoter collect himself sufficiently to reply that it was nothing.

Tilita came over to him with sympathy in her eyes and the curve of her lips:

"*Señor*, I see the sunset brings sadness to you also. No doubt you have loved ones there——"

She glanced toward the setting sun.

"I was thinking—" And then he grew ashamed of the covetousness of his thoughts and added—

"Are you going to the temple?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"I will go with you."

Tilita assented by a movement and turned to Nunes for the leading string of the young vicuna.

The Colombian stared, puzzled, at the maneuver.

"But, *señorita*, I thought you said no man could accompany you to the sacrifice!"

Tilita looked at Nunes surprized:

"I said only a kinsman, *señor*. He is my *primo*."

"*Primo! Primo!*" cried Balthazar with an amazed face. "Why he is not half so much a *primo* as I!"

"But he is! My *madre* said so!"

Nunes turned to the promoter.

"*Señor*, you are not going to poach on my preserves in an *affair del corazon* on such a pretext as being a *primo!*"

"My dear fellow," said Lassiter in English, and rather amused, "I am doing nothing. I am simply standing here——"

"Yes, but you permit it!" snapped the Colombian in the same tongue.

"But she wouldn't have let you go with her anyway," smiled Lassiter.

"You can tell her you are not her *primo!*"

"And cause a *señorita* to lead her goat for herself? Do you think I am so unmanly?" Lassiter reached for the leading string, and it was surrendered him.

The Colombian whirled on his heel.

"*Voy, señor*, you insult me before my *inamorata*—and call yourself *mi amigo! Mio Dios!* What sort of a friend is it that seizes—that seduces your *querida! Caramba!*"

Lassiter preserved a straight face with an effort.

"What are we going to do with this lamb, *prima?*" With a faint accent on the "*prima*" for Balthasar's benefit.

"It is to feed my brothers and sisters, *primo*."

"Oh—the fourteen?"

"*Si, primo*," said the girl solemnly.

The fitness of the girl's faith gave Lassiter a queer but intense satisfaction. It seemed as decorative mentally, as, physically, were the curves of her body or her fluent step. Nunes and his irritation faded from the promoter's mind.

They followed the sandy beach with the vicuna making little runs past them and being drawn up short by the cord. A small headland of stone broke the swing of the sand and projected out into the lake three or four hundred yards ahead of them. A stony, irregular path led from one of the entrances of the *teocalla* down to this headland.

This headland seemed to be Tilita's objective. When, presently, they walked up the little rise, Lassiter saw that it extended two arms out into the water and formed a small stony bay. Stretched over the bay, the New Yorker was sharply surprized to see a kind of fireman's circular net.

The whole inlet of water was not more than twenty-five feet wide. The net was moored to the rocks that formed a rough crescent about the bay. The supporting guys were glued to the stones and converged to a center like the spokes of a wheel.

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[*] As a set-off to Mr. Lassiter's impressionistic eulogy of the great Motobatl *teocalla*, the reader should consult Murray's *Guide to Motobatl*, pp. 167-201; Barrao's *Architectura de los Incas*, and Boisson's *L'antiquités de Motobatl*: Greystone Pub. Co., London.

The learned Frenchman very justly says, "While in actual dimensions the work of these last Incans greatly exceeds in magnitude any of the primitives known to man, yet their baroque style can not be mentioned in the same breath with the restraint and dignity of the rock-cut tombs of Persepolis and Nimrud, or the tomb of Midas at Dogan-Lu."

Upon these guys were laid the woof of the net or hammock, circling round and round in ever increasing whorls. A certain geometrical precision about the hammock impressed Lassiter that great care had gone into its construction.

"Is that the web of the sun, *prima?*" asked the man curiously.

"*Si, primo.*" (Yes, cousin.)

"Now what do we do?"

"When the sun dips behind the cliff, *primo,* toss the lamb into the hammock."

"Won't it fall out?"

"No, it will stick."

Then Lassiter observed the glister of bird-lime on the central cords of the netting, similar to Gogoma's humming-bird trap. Such elaborate paraphernalia interested Lassiter. Then he turned to the girl and with a certain feeling of intimacy, began to delve into the intricacies of her curious faith.

"How will your brothers and sisters get the lamb, *prima?*"

"The boat of the sun will swim under the lake and take my offering," explained the girl simply.

Lassiter continued his attentive attitude and the girl continued.

"YOU see, during the day, the sun climbs over the heavens on a great cord, such as you see in the web. By night it slides down behind Motobatl and sails under this lake and comes out in the *teocalla.* Now if my brothers and sisters in the sun are hungry, our sacrifice will vanish as the sun passes under the lake; but if they are not hungry, it will remain and the priests will eat it because it is holy meat."

The New Yorker repressed a smile at this naive method of replenishing the sacerdotal table.

"When you toss the lamb in, *primo,*" went on the girl gravely, "kneel at once by me with your back to the hammock and your face to the sun and pray."

"Yes, *señorita.*"

"That is very important," she assured, large-eyed. "If you should see the god come out in the net, you would die."

"Yes, *prima.*"

Tilita looked at the dipping sun.

"Now, *primo*——"

And she knelt on the stones.

The American picked up the lamb with a queer sensation, at this, the first religious rite he had ever performed in his life. The pet vicuña lay in his arms and began nuzzling at his poncho after the fashion of lambs.

The little animal's trust sent a faint repugnance along his nerves at sacrificing it to Gogoma's table. He glanced around. The watery smell of the lake at evening, the deep orange note of the sunset over cliffs and peaks and temple, the kneeling girl, brought a sort of wistful melting into Lassiter's breast.

There was no other human creature in sight except the small dark figure of Nunes far up the sand. They were alone. As the sun disappeared, Lassiter turned and tossed the lamb into the center of the net. The lime gripped it in a twisted attitude and held it immovable. It rested quietly, without a struggle. The man turned and knelt at Tilita's side.

He could faintly hear the girl whispering her vesper prayer. Her face wore the ecstatic expression that he had seen on the faces of Catholic girls in the Venezuelan cathedrals.

At that moment he heard a ripple in the water behind him. Surprize and curiosity pulled him about when Tilita's hands caught his face, covered his eyes and held his head against her shoulder. Her palms were small and firm and smelled of milk.

She held him in a flattering captivity for ten or fifteen seconds. Then came another rippling behind them. She loosed him with a shuddering breath. Her face was chalky against her black hair.

"Oh, my dear cousin," she shivered, "how you frightened me! If you had moved, Pachacamac would have snatched you from me!"

Lassiter stared at the bloodless face. He arose a little nervously and helped her up. Then he looked into the web of the sun. It was empty. The lamb was gone.

When he raised his eyes, he saw darkness covered the mighty face of the *teocalla,* but out of its rayed windows poured a brilliancy as if the sinking sun had risen again inside the cliff. A veritable fountain of light beat outward from the interior. The round windows glared down on the man and the woman in the falling darkness. In a few minutes the light winked out as swiftly as it had sprung into being.

VII

THE disappearance of the lamb from the net registered a shock on the promoter's nerves which he did not realize until night. Then, however, it asserted itself in his dreams and troubled his sleep.

The moment he lost consciousness he fancied himself back at the lakeside with the vicuña in his arms ready to throw it into the net. Every detail was precisely as he had experienced it during the evening, except, just when he was ready to throw, the little vicuña changed into Tilita.

He was under some horrible compulsion to fling the girl into the net. She was clinging to him, beseeching. He could feel her form pressed against him, her milky palm against his face; then just as he swung her into destruction, he awoke with a violent start, gasping for breath, with a hammering heart and a sweating body.

Time after time he was startled awake by this nightmare. The night seemed endless. At his last awakening, he saw, with a great sense of relief, the first silver of dawn whitening the jungle. It came over him like a balm, for he knew if he fell asleep again, it would be dreamless.

The dull silver strengthened in the airy chambers of the paddlewood. Dew, dripping from the leaves made a faint wide pattering. A belated firefly glowed and paled against the dark bole of the tree. The promoter lay looking at the fly, its delicate yellow fire on the verge of sending him to sleep again when gradually he became aware that some one had entered his cubicle.

Without looking he knew it was Birdsong. The colporteur retained his rustic habit of rising during the latter hours of the night, to what purpose Lassiter never could discover.

Lassiter closed his eyes and wooed the sleep the firefly had promised, but the knowledge that Birdsong was standing beside him frustrated his inhospitable design. Finally, without looking or moving he said—

"Well?"

"Are you awake, Brother Lassiter?"

"I haven't slept all night."

The promotor opened his eyes.

The colporteur had a pack of Bibles on his back evidently just ready to set off on his crusade.

"J'want anything?" slurred the New Yorker at last.

The colporteur fumbled in his packs, moved uneasily and at last blurted out.

"You got more education than I have, Brother Lassiter——"

The promoter let that pass.

"But I've read the Bible more than you have."

"You certainly have," yawned Lassiter.

"And you could easily—er—quite easily—ah—fall into sin and not know it, Brother Lassiter."

"Sin!" The promoter opened his eyes fully and looked at the colporteur with a faint amusement in them.

"Yes, sir, sin," he repeated doggedly.

"What kind of sin?"

"You bent your knee to Bal."

The promoter lifted his head.

"To—what?"

"To Bal."

"Birdsong, what are you driving at?"

The revivalist plucked up his determination.

"God have mercy on you, Brother Lassiter, have you fell into sin unbeknownst?"

"But when—where—what——"

"Why, yestiddy evening!" cried the colporteur. "I saw you kneeling beside that idolatrous woman down yonder by the lake joining her in her filthy and idolatrous worship of Bal!"

The promoter stared at the stocky little man with a growing amusement.

"Why that didn't amount to anything, Birdsong—I didn't pray."

"But you bent the knee."

The definite article before "knee" increased Lassiter's mirth.

"Yes, I bent the knee," he admitted in faint burlesque.

"Was it in mawkery?"

"Well—no. It wasn't exactly in mockery either."

Birdsong shook his head.

"Brother Lassiter, to bend the knee to Bal is strickly against God's holy Word. I hope God'll touch your heart, Brother Lassiter——"

From this the colporteur glided into an invocation:

"Oh, Lord, do touch his hard heart! Look down on this idolatrous and adulterous man, Lord, and smite him with conviction. He don't know you, Lord, but he has let a strange woman lead him to the altar of Bal.

Save him, God! Save Brother Lassiter from consorting with idolatrous women! Save him from his filthy lusts! Save——"

All this was in true backwood revival style where the praying heaps every form of abuse and contumely on the audience, but the promoter was not accustomed to any such blanket pleas for pardon. He sat up sharply.

"Look here," he interrupted. "Where do you get all that stuff about filthy lusts? A prayer is a prayer, but——"

The colporteur came out of his sing-song and looked steadily at his friend.

"Didn't you kneel down by her side because she was a woman, Brother Lassiter?"

The promoter was angry.

"I did it just as I would with any sincere worshiper, Birdsong. I hope I am broad-minded enough in my views not to allow creed or——"

"Brother Lassiter," drawled the colporteur unruffled, "I've been praying to Jesus Christ for your soul every morning and night for over a month and a half. You've seen me lots of times, but you never have knelt down by my side——"

The promoter reached up and scratched his jaw. "Well—I—I overlooked it——"

"No, you didn't, Brother Lassiter."

This ushered in an uncomfortable pause. During the pause, Lassiter pondered which would most become his dignity, to answer this reflection with quiet denial, or with that restrained sarcasm, of which Lassiter, in common with most other men, considered himself a master, or simply to say nothing. Further reflection convinced him there was little to say.

It was Birdsong who began again.

"Do you know what old Nehemiah said about Solomon in his blessed thirteenth chapter and twenty-eighth verse, Brother Lassiter?"

"No, —— it, I don't!" snapped the promotor, forming an instant prejudice against the remarks of old Nehemiah on any subject whatever.

"Well, he said there was no king like Solomon, who was beloved of God; nevertheless did outlandish women cause him to sin."

The colporteur stopped flatly on the word "sin."

"So that's what he said!"

"That's what he said, Brother Lassiter," responded the Arkansan unruffled, "and if your intentions are honorable, Brother Lassiter, as I hope they be, I will quote you the next verse, which may fit your case to a tiddyyumptum.

"In the next verse old Nehemiah says, 'Hearken ye unto this great evil!' " Here Birdsong shook his finger at the promoter. " 'Hearken ye unto this great evil, ye, who transgress against our God in marrying strange wives' — strange wives — hearken ye— Are you harking, Brother Lassiter, if that fits you any better?"

To Lassiter's relief, Birdsong took down his finger and adjusted his Bible packs.

"Well, I got to be going now," he said in a casual tone, "You think them things over, Brother Lassiter. It's for your good I'm saying 'em. You see, Brother Lassiter, we've got souls—both of us. If it wasn't for that, I'd fade your sin and go you one better, Brother Lassiter."

And the colporteur moved away with his pack on his back and presently was lost in the faint morning light.

FOR several minutes the promoter sat rather stunned at this onslaught. It was so utterly undeserved. Then the humor of the thing seeped in to him and he began smiling; presently the phrase "strange wives" revisited his imagination.

One of the distinctive differences between the Orient and the Occident, between pessimism and optimism, is that to one the word "strange" connotes something sinister; to the other, something glamorous.

There is little doubt that when the prophet Nehemiah wrote his celebrated thirteen, twenty-eight, and nine, which Birdsong had so ably quoted, he was far from meaning any flattery when he used the word "*nokri*," "strange wives."

To his Hebrew hearers, steeped in oriental pessimism, it would have carried no commendation. But the spirit of peoples change with their geography, and this changing spirit is very likely to breathe new connotations into one and the same word.

In Lassiter's ears, the expression, "strange wives" carried a certain lure. So he sat musing in his hammock and repeated aloud two or three times—"a strange woman—a strange wife—an idolatrous woman—" and the phrases spread colorful intentions before the dreamer. They suggested bizarre wooings, gorgeous and barbaric ceremonies and exotic satisfactions—a strange wife——"

He fancied himself marrying Tilita in the vast baroque temple of the sun. He could see himself kneeling with her before a golden altar. Above them stood the vast naked Gogoma, dripping with sweat—and annointing with perfume—the beat of barbaric music—then their return to one of these vast trees—the slow luxury of day and night—the springing up of children about them—many children, such as old Prymoxl bore, and of whom, only one remained.

But theirs would not fade. They would be gay, laughing, half arboreal little cherubs and they, in their turn, would come and kneel in the temple of the sun—and so life would go on.

The flare of color suggested by this vision shivered through the poet.

He arose briskly, shook off his absurd reverie and dressed himself, for it was now plain day.

The thought of Prymoxl's children somehow suggested the web of the sun. In the more rational daylight, the promoter made a shrewd guess as to the function of the net. It was merely a priestly device for collecting tithes and meats for the sacerdotal table.

The mysterious disappearance of the lamb, which had given him a turn the preceding evening, no doubt was nothing more than some priestly hocus-pocus. He decided that he would walk down and look more closely into the mechanism of the contrivance.

The promoter set out lakeward and after some thirty minutes' brisk walking reached the lake and the stony inlet where the net was stretched. The agent clambered down the stones for a more detailed inspection of the hammock.

It was an ingeniously made contrivance. The whorl of limed cords in the center were a marvelous mechanism. Each strand was made of two hollow tubes twisted together and filled with a viscous limy material. This limy liquid oozed out through the colloidal tubes and constantly renewed their sticky surfaces. Instead of drying in the hot sunshine, the net grew stickier and stickier.

Lassiter took a bamboo from a bit of jetsam at the edge of the lake, then went back and touched it to this viscid center. When he tried to pull it away the strands untwisted and resisted his pull with the flexibility of limed rubber. If a captive drew out one foot, it would surely thrust the other into a deeper viscosity.

It was such a powerful and devilish gin that Lassiter's surprize expanded to wonderment. This was far too much craft to expend on a mere priestly device for gathering alms. It held sinister implications.

The priests of the sun would not construct a club to kill a midge. This net was far beyond the strength of a vicuna lamb, or a vicuna—the thing would have held a tiger. Such preparations suggested a far grimmer purpose than holding a lamb for Gogoma's table.

The promoter stepped gingerly on the first transverse cord, and then from cord to cord toward the limed center. He stood, balancing himself, speculating on the thing. No doubt the hot climate developed this contrivance. Meat for the temple must be kept alive or it would spoil. So this extraordinary fabrication had been evolved by necessity, that fecund mother of all inventions. The same ingenuity turned toward aviation would have flown over the encircling cliffs to freedom!

The water over which the net was suspended was a profound blue and appeared of great depth. It was full of shadows and half forms. Amid the reflections of rocks and palms and distant palisades, he saw the slow sway of undergrowth; then presently made out a sort of pale blob that protruded from some subaqueous cavern. He shaded his eyes with his hands and peered down.

It was confused with the reflection of a solitary cloud. At last he decided he would thrust his bamboo down and punch the thing. It might be the clew to the whole contrivance. He was addressing his pole for this purpose when a voice on the bank called to him sharply to desist.

A SURPRIZE brought Lassiter up, and he saw a tall raw-boned brown man with the priestly heron feather in his hair. Besides, he was armed with a long pole with an obsidian blade on it, something like an elongated scythe. Coiled around his arm was a great loop of the colloidal rope used in the net.

The fellow looked as if he might have been sent down from the temple to mow down the trespasser on the net, so Lassiter got ashore and asked what was the matter.

"It is dangerous there, *señor*."

"What's the danger?"

The fellow drew down an ironic mouth—

"One does not care to rush into the bright mansions of the sun, before it is absolutely necessary, *señor*."

A certain cynicism about this remark caused the promoter to look him over carefully.

"I am Jagala," said the man, "a priest and a rope gatherer—" he shook the coil on his arm—"and the holy Gogoma told me of you, a Señor Lassiter."

The promoter acknowledged the introduction.

"A rope *gatherer?*"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Don't you mean a rope maker?"

"I make this rope?" Jagala had a long face, and now the lift of his pointed brows gave him a Mephistophelean look.

"Well, some one makes it!" cried Lassiter.

"No one makes it, *señor*. I gather it from the cliffs."

"How does it come there?" exclaimed the promoter.

Jagala shrugged.

"It is the gift of the sun, *señor*. When the sun climbs down the side of the cliff into the lake——"

"I've heard all that."

"If you don't believe it, *señor*," defended the rope gatherer, "just look at this rope and tell me if any man can make such a rope!"

Lassiter took the rope and reperused it for the hundredth time.

"You really mean to tell me you find this cordage *hanging* from the cliffs?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"And you have no idea how it came there?"

"*Señor*," snapped the priest, "I have told you twice that the sun in its climb down the sides of the cliff leaves this rope as a gift to his people!"

The promoter nodded, "Yes, yes," and stood studying the rope, with an occasional glance at the web of the sun.

As he stood looking first at one, then at the other, he saw something slowly rising through the water beneath the net. The priest also saw it for he walked down to the margin of the lake, thrust his pole and hook under the net and drew the object to him. He swung it out on the stones. To Lassiter's amazement, it was the very lamb he had thrown into the net on the preceding evening.

The little creature was stiff and water soaked. Its legs were bound tightly to its body by several turns of the mysterious rope. Jagala clipped one end of this binding cord with his obsidian blade, tossed the little animal back into the water, and unwound the cord by letting the cadaver revolve in the water. As he salvaged the line, he wound it on his arm with the rest of his findings.

When Jagala finished, the promoter took his bamboo and fished the dead body out on the stones. Jagala strolled on back toward the temple. After the carcass had dried out somewhat, Lassiter settled himself for a careful study of the dead animal.

Its throat was not cut. The region over the heart where butchers stick their kills was intact. A painstaking search over its whole body failed to discover the slightest blemish to its skin. Its death duplicated the slaying of the pack mules on the cliff. Apparently the priestly contrivance could destroy at a distance—or else some athletic fellow like Jagala climbed the cliff.

The promoter was considering which of these clews he would pursue when he started to arise, and pressed down on the cadaver to lift himself. His hand crushed into the body as if it had been an empty sack. Lassiter drew out his knife and opened the vicuna.

The viscera of the little creature seemed dried up. Its heart was a blackish knot; its entrails might have been tripe. If some one had turned a tinner's blow-pipe into the lamb, it would have produced the same desiccated appearance. It was another link in the chain of enigmas that surrounded existence in Motobatl.

By the time Lassiter finished his inspection it was high noon. Profound silence and a fulgor of sunlight lay over lake and temple. The vicuna was spread open before Lassiter, and the brilliance of the light upon its withered entrails accented its sinister significance.

A vast loneliness fell over the promoter. With all these grim riddles accumulating about him, there was not one person in all the crater from whom he could expect even a sensible discussion of the matter.

Nunes was superstitious, and besides had been rather grum toward the promoter since their little tiff over Tilita. Birdsong solved every riddle by a fiat straight out of the blue. If the priests knew, they retained their knowledge; and as for old Prymoxl and other ordinary Indians, they were in as hopeless a welter of theological explanation as Birdsong.

And Lassiter's own brain had come to a complete balk; yet he had a profound feeling that it was because he had no human contact by which he could orientate himself. He felt, in his heart, if he had just an ordinary man-on-the-street, picked up off of Broadway, a man who would think straight, whose brain did not skid at once into absurdities—he would solve it.

Moreover the solution must be hovering almost in sight. One isolated conundrum may prove insoluble, but half a dozen, all focusing on the same point, are mutually explanatory and suggestive. He was amazed; he was chagrined that the web of the sun lay under his eyes as inscrutable as the first time he ever saw it.

PRESENTLY into the promoter's self disgust crept the murmur of distant voices. They were just audible and for several minutes did not interrupt Lassiter's brooding. Indeed, this slight human touch somehow helped the agent to his first tenable theory. It was exceedingly simple. An underground tunnel led from temple to net. The priests had watched him from the window and had timed the thrusting out of the vicuña under his eyes to help mystify him. It was the simplest of ruses; worthy of an intelligence such as Jagala's.

Then he attacked the problem of the peculiar condition of the lamb, but just here the voices he had heard became so loud as to distract his thought. It was a man and a woman quarreling. He became attentive and could distinguish the edged tilts of a woman's soprano, and the peculiar monotonous buzzing of a man's baritone which mark the sexes in anger.

He looked over the crest of the little knoll and presently saw two figures emerge from the palms coming toward the beach. The woman carried a calabash. Both were gesticulating angrily. Their voices reared at each other.

Suddenly the man seized her free hand. The woman screamed, tried to wrench loose, when her companion caught her in his arms and began one of those dodging struggles to kiss her. She dropped the calabash, clawed at his face and twisted her head from side to side to escape his lips.

Had Lassiter been a younger man, he would have rushed to the assistance of assaulted beauty, but he was wise. He watched the love fight with the amused tolerance of a bachelor of thirty-nine. The grand passion often takes the form of blows and resisted kisses. The result of these hostilities would be another tree commandeered for housekeeping in Motobatl— At that instant Lassiter saw the girl was Tilita.

The promoter leaped to his feet with a kind of spasm in his chest. Next instant he was in full charge down the slope and up the sand. The glare of the sun went red. The man's back was to him, but Tilita saw him and screamed—

"*Primo!*"

Next moment the fellow whirled. For an instant, Lassiter saw Balthasar staring at him with bloodless face. The Colombian made a grab for his pistol. Tilita's arms prevented. Lassiter jumped in with a furious swing at the brown man's chin. Nunes yelled and dodged. Next moment the two men went down on the sand together.

The promoter fell on top, but his attack was ineffective from its very fury. He grabbed the Colombian's ears and jounced his head against the ground. He loosed a hand to seize the wretch's mustache and yank his mouth into monstrous shapes. He mauled at the eyes, trying to smash the yellow countenance.

The muleteer used only one hand for defense; with the other he grappled under his hip for his automatic. He wriggled and pitched and sputtered Spanish oaths. He almost threw Lassiter over his head by heaving up his stomach, but the promoter lunging and lurching, pounded the saddle-colored face with every blow raising a splotch.

It was a mere spurt of fighting, but Lassiter tired as swiftly as he fought. He was soft to the core. In two minutes his head was roaring and his mouth so full of slime he could hardly breathe. He seemed in a furnace. Sweat ceased to flow on him. He was burning up.

Suddenly he saw Balthasar was drawing his automatic. He grabbed the muleteer's elbow. During the pause, Nunes caught Lassiter's right. They came to a straining impasse. The promoter stared into

Balthasar's bleeding face. Gradually the yellow man's pistol arm strained out. Lassiter flung all his failing force against it, but the muleteer's sweaty skin slipped through his hold. A panic siezed Lassiter.

He suddenly realized he would be killed. In three minutes he would have his brains blown out over a half-breed girl's kiss! It was absurd! He tried to pant out some words through his slimy mouth, to reason before—he clenched desperately—

"Nunes——"

At that moment, a third hand was laid on Balthasar's pistol arm and stopped it absolutely.

"Here, gentlemen," called a cheerful voice. "Have you forgot what the Good Book says, 'How good it is for brethren to dwell together in unity?' Git up, brother, leave off this scuffing and rejoice with me!"

As Birdsong's fresh strength had complete control of the situation, both men let go. The colporteur lifted Lassiter by one arm and got him to his feet, then he picked up the maltreated muleteer, keeping one hand casually on the pistol arm. He brushed aside the whole affair as trivial.

"Brothers, rejoice with me!" he cried. "I have garnered three souls into the blessed fold of the master!"

The promoter stared unsteadily at the jubilant colporteur. The blood pounded in Lassiter's ears and his head was splitting. It was all he could do to keep from falling.

The Colombian spat out a mouthful of blood, touched his raw face, but said with a certain return of his habitual courtesy—

"*Señor*, that is good news!"

"Glorious news!" pæaned the colporteur. "And it was all accomplished, my dear Brother Balthasar, in the twinkling of an eye, through a miracle!"

"A miracle," repeated Nunes, starting toward the lake to wash out his mouth.

"Yes, a miracle, with the aid of ordinary parlor matches! I never saw a more divine manifestation. I'll ask you two brothers now, to give me all the matches you happen to have in your pockets."

Both the fighters fished out their lucifers and handed them over. Then Lassiter got unsteadily to the girl where she stood clinging to a palm. Every nerve in the man jangled. He could not make heads or tails of what Birdsong was saying.

"Come on, Tilita—come on!"

Before he could say more, he spat out ropy saliva.

The two started off aimlessly through the jungle. Birdsong and Nunes walked on down to the lake. Birdsong was drawling away with great enthusiasm about his miracle.

VIII

PRESENTLY the promoter drew on Tilita's arm and moderated what was a flight down to a walk. He could not hurry so fast; his head was aching too badly. The girl slowed up trembling and glanced back through the jungle. Her breast rose and fell sharply under her green bodice.

"H-He is a terrible man, *primo*," she panted.

Lassiter glanced down at his companion. The struggle with Nunes had left red welts on her neck and breast and cheeks. One of her ears was crimson where his beard had scraped. Such tangibilia of her outrage renewed Lassiter's fury. The pressure in his aching head increased.

"I—I ought to have killed him!" he gasped remorsefully. "I—I wonder why I didn't kill him——"

He tried to think. The fight was blurred in his mind. He plodded on trying to reconstruct it, trying to discover why he had failed to kill the Colombian.

Tilita moved at his side through splotches of shade and sunshine. Presently it gave her the appearance of moving under some some sort of luminous tapestry that rose and fell with her gliding progress. She gave Lassiter brief side glances and presently said, quite unexpectedly—

"I mean, *primo*, that Señor Birdsong is a terrible man."

Lassiter looked around, quite taken aback.

"Birdsong!"

"*Si*, I hate him!" she accented the word with a narrowing of her black eyes.

"And not Nunes!"

"O-h—no——"

She shrugged and evidently dismissed the Colombian's case with slight concern.

"After what he's done——"

"The poor fellow could not help himself."

"Couldn't help himself!"

"He *said* he couldn't help himself, *primo*—" defensively.

A foolish feeling came over Lassiter. Apparently he had been attempting murder over a foible, over mere bad manners—such as the Stendill typists used when they buffed their finger-nails in public. Lassiter felt trifled with.

"Tilita," he said grimly, "if you didn't object to his——"

"I *did* object, and fight every time!" defended the girl sharply.

The number of times implied left Lassiter blank and simple. Tilita proceeded with some embarrassment:

"He said he couldn't help—er—the way he did. He said every time he looked at me, a—a sort of—well, I—I don't know, *primo*, I don't understand it— He said a sort of wild fury——"

"Oh, good Lord!" groaned the promoter, "has he been telling you that sort of stuff—and you believing it——"

"Well, *primo*, he *acted* as if it were true—" Her voice tilted up in a clear note on "true," which signified that while she deferred to Lassiter's wider experience, to the best of her knowledge and belief, an amorous mania certainly seized Dom Pedro Balthasar Nunes when he came into her presence.

Lassiter was utterly disgusted, and yet somehow obscurely pleased with her innocent stupidity.

"Tilita," he remonstrated, "you can't believe what a man says—no pretty girl can. Good Lord, I can hear him now, buzzing away, working himself up, explaining how he has been dreaming, yearning, burning for a beautiful *arbol-de-vaca* gatherer, and how the sight of you causes a madness to rush upon him—then I suppose he made a dive at you for a strangle hold——"

A chastened nodding affirmed these deductions.

"Well, take it from me, Tilita, no man ever gets so far but what he can turn around and walk off if he wants to—just turn around and walk off—like that—" he snapped his fingers—"they can all do it—if they want to. The trouble is, getting them to want to——"

Here he broke off. His head throbbed too badly for talk. He kicked out of his path a scarlet and purple orchid which he could have sold for a thousand or two to the New York greenhouses as an unknown variety.

Tilita rolled her black eyes around at him, and he was unable to tell whether his counsel had impressed her or not. It irritated him.

"Look here," he burst out, "how many times has he—no—don't answer that—It's none of my affair— We'll drop the subject."

"Two times."

Lassiter drew an easier breath. It eased his head somewhat. But nevertheless he wondered why women would listen to such piffle. It was amazing in a girl of Tilita's intelligence! It seemed to him that the most inexperienced female could penetrate so impudent an——

He became aware that the girl was smiling to herself. The whiteness of her teeth lit up her black eyes and scarlet lips in a lovely way. The smile somehow vexed the dignified Stendill agent.

"Tilita," he suggested, "it seems to me after what has occurred——"

She became serious again—almost serious.

The girl had a fruity look. Her skin absorbed sunlight like a ripe pear and then glowed gently at the New Yorker. She looked as if she had soaked from the jungle its fulgor, its intensity of color, its pressure of vitality. Undoubtedly man is the modest sex. Men spend much cleverness in trying to veil their women, and women spend much more cleverness in getting unveiled.

Lassiter fumbled through his clothing and found a pin; he handed it to her.

"Your jacket is torn," he suggested briefly.

The girl took the pin, tested its strength curiously. Evidently it was the first she had ever seen.

"How small and strong it is," she admired.

"Fasten your jacket with it," said the promoter.

The man studied the fall of light through the jungle while she fixed the rent.

"How old are you, Tilita?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Thirteen, *primo*."

Lassiter was thunderstruck.

"Thirteen!"

"*Si, primo*— Why?"

Lassiter was constrained to make another calculation in regard to old Prymoxl's age. She was probably not over twenty-six or eight.

"I just wanted to know. You seem older."

The girl looked at him anxiously.

"Do I look old?"

"No-o—not the way you mean—you look developed."

"Oh—y-es—" She colored faintly.

Lassiter appraised her, unable to understand it. How was it possible in thirteen little years to fashion such a creature? Then, too, her swift flowering foretold her swift decay. He thought of Prymoxl—that rag. Only a little time ago she must have been as beautiful as her daughter. The promoter pursued his queer calculations. When he himself was thirteen years old, the ancient Prymoxl was born.

When he was studying Spanish in the Stendill offices, Tilita came into this world. Now here he was at thirty-nine on a love stroll with the girl through the jungle— The thought gave him a queer feeling of being a sort of human mountain and watching flowers bloom and perish on its slopes.

It cast a sort of pathos over the girl. Her beauty would be so brief. It was the grace of a swallow sailing against the evening sky, that vanished in the making. Lassiter looked at her and wondered if she were up north would the higher latitudes preserve her volatile loveliness?

He thought of Maine—a Maine coast cottage in the Summer, and—say the Carolinas for the Winter. If he were married to Tilita and could escape this human hothouse of Motobatl, he would domicile her in—say Charleston—one of those old mansions down on the Battery. A sun-worshiper in the remote conservatism of Charleston's Battery!

The incongruity of such an idea set the promoter laughing. The girl was surprized and wanted to know the reason. The promoter could not hope to explain his mental meanderings to the girl, so he asked—

"How came you to be so angry at Birdsong, Tilita?"

THE smile on the girl's face vanished abruptly, and Lassiter discovered that her countenance had that extraordinary quality of seeming to look its best in whatever mood it wore. About one woman out of three or four million possesses this charm.

"He—but he is your friend, *primo*."

"In a way."

"Then let's not talk of it."

A grotesque suspicion filtered through Lassiter's brain.

"You don't mean that he—and Nunes both——"

"Oh no-o-o!" cried Tilita, outraged at the thought of Birdsong caressing her. "I know what he said to you this morning."

The promoter stared at her.

"To me?" he asked blankly.

Tilita's lips quivered.

"He was talking about me——"

The promoter looked at the girl trying to think back to the morning.

"Señor Nunes told me," she added.

Just then Lassiter recalled Birdsong's Biblical discussion.

"Oh—that——"

The girl nodded sharply, searching his face.

"That was nothing."

"He said evil things against me," declared Tilita hotly. "He said you were wicked even to know me."

From her wrath it was evident that Nunes had informed her fully of the conversation and all its implications. It embarrassed the promoter.

"Why did you let him say such things of me?" she pressed.

"Really, Tilita, you—you can't very well tell what a man's going to say till he says it——"

"You let him talk on."

"I couldn't stop him."

"Why?"

"He's a sort of preacher."

"A preacher——"

"Yes, a—a preacher is a man you pay to say disagreeable things; you can't take offense at a fellow, you know, when he's on his job."

Lassiter hoped this little skit would make her smile. Instead she grew angrier, opened her eyes wider and seemed taller.

"If you pay him to say such things of me," she declared passionately, "you believe him!"

"Why, I don't pay him!" cried the promoter astonished.

"You said you did."

Lassiter was upset.

"Believe what? I was talking in a general way about preachers, a sort of joke. What do I believe? What are you talking about?"

"You believe it!" cried the girl curiously moved. "He said I was a strange woman—a wicked woman—that your God forbid our marriage—that I would be a strange wife—strange—strange— What is there *strange*, about me?"

She flung out her arms in a passion of self-revelation. She was on the verge of sobbing. The pin he had given her pulled loose.

The word "marriage" on Tilita's lips set up a surprizing emotional resonance in the white man. It amazed him that she held the same thought that he had just indulged. A sudden hammering filled his chest.

"Why—Tilita—" he said shakenly, "I—I don't think you are strange——"

"But that man said——"

"It makes no difference—" His voice was cut off by a sort of stricture in his throat. "My little *prima,*" he said huskily. He reached out toward her. At the touch of her flesh, a sort of languor flowed up his arms and filled his body.

The notion that she was "strange," that any atom of her was "strange" to him! With his lips to her ear, he whispered shakily—

"Tilita, *carissima,* the blood in my heart is not more——"

He wavered into silence as her warmth and softness filled his arms. He could feel her trembling. He, himself, was so shaken he could hardly stand. The smell of milk on her lips and throat was headier than wine.

"I was so afraid I would be a strange wife——"

Heaven only knew what construction she placed upon the word "strange."

They remained clinging to each other. To stand became a burden. By common impulse they moved across to a tree.

By glancing down the man could see her black lashes outlined against her cheek and the irregular lift and fall of her bosom. A sun splotch fell through a rent in her bodice and filled it with half lights.

Because he meant to marry her, Lassiter fumbled, trying to close the tear. At touch of her a great weakness seized him. It beat in his chest, it throbbed in his neck, it swam in his brain. And yet it was a kind of rest.

HOW long Lassiter experienced this transfiguration, he never knew. It was a moment; it was an eternity. It had no connection with Time. Time was a pipe organ chanting its processional and its recessional, but in its midst, Time ceased.

It came vaguely to Lassiter that such ecstasy was the goal of life; that all life was like an ocean and this wave of divinity moved through its floods. For an instant it lifted all men and all women to its iridescent crest. Then passed on. Other droplets would take their places, but that man and that woman would never again know ecstasy.

Yet the wave was perpetual. It rode on and on through existence, leaping at the sky, shot with rainbows, scattering jewels, a delirious immortality, composed of instants, a Buddha of bliss, composed of fading entities.

Very slowly the jungle reformed about the lovers. The trees dripped with light. The silhouette of a monkey passed across their luminous background. A little bird flung out a triumphant phrase over the capture of a worm.

The promoter watched the little gladiator idly. It was a striped bird with a yellow breast. Lassiter had seen such songsters in Central Park. Such tiny creatures drift from the arctic to the tropics with the shifting seasons, a migration of jewels.

His musing brought the promoter a notion of tying a message to one of these birds and communicating with the outside world. If he should send numbers of these messages out year after year, surely some one would salvage one and learn the strange secret of Motobatl.

Tilita moved as if conscious that their two thought currents had separated one from the other. She sat up, drew a little way from Lassiter, blinked her eyes and smiled at him as if aroused from a deep sleep. They began talking of their marriage. The girl told Lassiter of the wedding ceremony in Motobatl. When they were married, Lassiter would have to run after her and catch her against the combined efforts of all her kinspeople.

"*All* of them?"

"Oh, yes," she nodded brightly.

"Will they try hard to stop me?"

Tilita broke into the most decorative laughter.

"Indeed they will! Oh, it's exciting! You'll get knocks with sticks and stones; you'll be tripped—" Then she noticed his lengthening face and comforted him, "Oh, it will make no difference to you, *carissima.* You will feel nothing. No groom does. Once a man came out with his head all bloody, but he felt nothing at all—absolutely nothing. He said he felt nothing at all—and you are so tall and strong——"

Tilita evidently anticipated a great social triumph.

But unfortunately, nature had bestowed upon Lassiter the dignity of a Portuguese. That was why he had succeeded so well in South America. He realized the respect due from one human being to another. Temperamentally he was akin to the inhabitants of Rio Janeiro, who never touch each other even in crowded streets.

Now the thought of marriage with this orchid of a girl in the hurly burly of football utterly dismayed the South American agent. He sat looking at her.

"Can't we live together without that, Tilita, somehow?"

The girl's eyes widened. A slow crimson flooded her face and throat.

"Live together without being married—" she gasped.

She made a movement, evidently about to jump up and run away. Lassiter reached for her with a sharp fear of loss. She was as offended as an American girl at an improper proposal.

"Wait—wait—hold on—it's all right—any sort of marriage, slapstick or grand opera——"

"Then what made you say—" began Tilita about to weep.

The promoter was afraid now even to criticise the form.

"Oh—I—of course I didn't mean——"

The girl searched his face and at last asked slowly—

"Perhaps Señor Birdsong will not allow you to marry me?"

The promoter broke into unaccustomed expletives. Birdsong had nothing to do with him. Nothing whatever. Birdsong was simply a fellow traveler and a fanatic and a fool——

"But don't you pay him?"

No, no, that was a sort of joke—just a little joke to put her in a good humor. When they were married, and living in a tree, she would have to watch these little bursts of wit and take no offense. He was quite a wag—in his way.

In saying all this Lassiter was under the imprssion he was steering away from dangerous ground into the broad safe highway of humor. Tilita sat nodding faintly. At last she asked—

"But doesn't his God forbid our marriage?"

Lassiter broke off his discourse on humor. He thought over the girl's question. He really didn't know whether the Bible forbade his marriage with Tilita or not. He supposed Birdsong was right. The fellow seemed to know a lot about the Book.

"Why—perhaps it does, Tilita—but——"

"Isn't his God your God?"

For some time the promoter sat considering how to answer her. He did not want to tell her of his fundamental lack of all religious faith; that God was to him a mere apprehension of a Something behind this cinema of existence, and that he felt this only occasionally; the greater part of the time he sensed only vacuity. It was no faith at all. It held no concrete creed. It was merely a vague emotion directed toward nothing.

But Lassiter was far from admitting such nihilism to Tilita. The artist in him loved a pretty faith in a woman. Somehow it harmonized with a woman's affection and sweetness like a flower in her hair. He looked upon an agnostic woman as he did upon the bearded lady. It made no difference to him what faith they confessed; Christianity, Mohammedanism, the pretty ancestor worship of Shintoism, or the worship of the Sun—anything with a lilt to it.

When Tilita repeated her question he came to himself with a little start.

"To tell you the truth, Tilita," he said by way of preface to his divarication, "in America, my country, the women attend to—er—believing in God and—er—all that sort of thing. It's our national custom."

The girl stared at him in amazement.

"The women!"

"Yes, the men, of course—back 'em up in it, and—ah—pay the bills——"

Tilita was amazed at such a custom. She leaned forward and sank her chin in the corolla of her fingers. In this pretty attitude she thought it over, staring away through the sun-soaked jungle.

"I wish it were that way in Motobatl," she mused wistfully, "then we women would keep all our babies."

She was so alluring, sitting thus, musing on her religion, and on their children yet to be, that a great melting filled Lassiter. He was constrained to fondle her again.

He felt that he understood her perfectly.

IX

IT IS a misfortune, indeed, almost a calamity for the province of biographical literature, that Charles Lassiter's passion for the Indian girl estranged him from Ezekiel Birdsong. This estrangement unfitted Lassiter for writing a sympathetic, or even a veridical account of that remarkable man.

Many other writers have attempted to reconstruct Birdsong's amazing career in Motobatl. The Motobatl Indians have been interviewed. Birdsong's letters to his wife have been studied and analyzed. Every *genre* of journal, from the stridor of the New York yellows to the basso profundo of the English quarterlies, has devoted fascicles to what may be termed the Birdsong myth.

But of Birdsong himself, little is known save those harsh and unsympathetic glimpses given of him in Lassiter's narrative.* That the very story of his greatness should be confided to so adverse a pen is the final touch of irony in Ezekiel Birdsong's life.

Of the beginnings of Birdsong's bold undertaking, Lassiter knew, or expressed nothing more than that it disturbed his morning sleep in the paddlewood.

He was annoyed by the revivalistic hymns; and during the last days of the promoter's co-tenancy with the revivalist Birdsong's sunrise prayer-meetings forced Lassiter to abandon late morning hours in his hammock.

The promoter formed the unwilling habit of rising betimes. Then he would walk down to the *arbol-de-vaca* forest where he would meet Tilita. The two would then spend the remainder of the day in agreeable courtship, and in liming birds and starting them with messages to civilization begging rescue.

One morning curiosity sent Lassiter down to one of the meetings to see what Birdsong and his converts were doing. The sunrise services were held under a banyan not far from the paddlewood. Lassiter joined the little congregation and sat down on one of the rude seats that had been extemporized between the boles. Some dozen Indians were there, and Birdsong stood on a dais with a pulpit beside him.

The whole service was as near a reproduction of the ordinary sunrise meeting as Birdsong could contrive. The colporteur had chosen a "topic" and cognate texts. Nunes translated these into Quichau from Birdsong's shocking Spanish. The Indians understood Quichua because this tongue is only a slight variant of the old Incan. After all this twisting through three languages, the new converts would arise and repeat their memory verses.

Lassiter, who possessed exceptional linguistic facility, could follow the texts through all their metamorphoses, and he heard some extraordinary renderings of King James' version.

Birdsong himself, standing on his dais, sweated under this mental struggle. Only his black oily hair remained unruffled. The left half and top of his hair had an ebony finish; over his right eye and ear, it broke into a gleaming scroll of large polished curls, greatly aided by a cow-lick over the right temple. It was the tonsure of a rustic arbiter elegantorium, and Lassiter was always amazed to see such hair on such an indomitable fellow.

Prolonged Ecuadorian sunshine had burned the colporteur quite as dark as Nunes, but it was the reddish brown of an Anglo-Saxon, not the yellowish brown of a native. During the services, three transverse wrinkles in the thick skin of Birdsong's forehead filled with sweat. This reflected the foliage of the banyan above and drew three bright green streaks above and parallel with his eye brows.

The colporteur exhorted his hearers to quit their sins and to give their hearts to God. He talked of God's desires, preferences and predilections with convincing intimacy. He had the power of a prestidigitator to visualize the impalpable.

His absolute conviction that there was a power above him, looking down on him, with whom he was in immediately personal touch, at last produced an illusion of reality even in Lassiter. The promoter received a very concrete impression that up in the banyan above them sat a very irascible old gentleman, who watched the worshipers closely, reading their thoughts, and who was on the *qui vive* for their every little fault, which he meant to punish terrifically.

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* Interested readers may consult any digest of current periodicals, under the caption, "Birdsong" or "Motobatl." For fuller accounts, see "Life of Ezekiel Birdsong," by Ralph Fenhope; Weatherall Printing Co., Glasgow; Bishop Langhorne's "Myth or Man," Starnes & Sykes, Richmond, Va.; "The Great End," by Humphrey Daniels, Pelton Pub. Co., Boston; and Philip Werner's more imaginative and therefore more nearly correct account, "The Man of Motobatl," The Collingwood Press, N. Y. For complete bibliography, consult card index of Congressional Library. This lists everything except a few pamphlets privately printed in Assamese.

At the conclusion of the address, Birdsong called upon his hearers to testify to the experiences through which they had passed in gaining salvation for their souls, or, as Birdsong expressed it, how did they know they had made their calling and election sure?

They arose one at a time. Some had seen visions, others had dreamed dreams. One fisherman avouched that a fish in his net had spoken to him. Birdsong greeted each new testimonial with fervent ejaculations and vigorous shakes of the hand.

In the midst of these felicitations, a middle-aged Indian arose and said that his wife would soon bear him a baby, his eighth child. He wanted to know what he should do in order that it should go to Heaven, instead of to the Sun.

Birdsong advised him to bring it to the banyan for baptism.

"Then what must I do with it, Brother Birdsong?"

"Train it to serve God and keep His commandments."

The Indian, whose name was Chacala, seemed astonished.

"Train it here in Motobatl?"

"Certainly!"

"My *eighth* child?"

"God numbers the hairs of your head, brother Chacala," said Birdsong, "but I never heard of him numbering a man's children, or caring what number it was. He loves 'em all."

Chacala sprang up with a glowing face.

"Then I may keep my child! Your God lets me keep my child! Praise God! You will excuse me, Brother Birdsong, I must hurry to my wife! She may be delivered of a boy while I sit here talking! Praise God!"

And to Lassiter's amazement, Chacala turned and ran from the banyan, going northward toward the lake.

CHACALA'S explosiveness ended the meeting. The colporteur and Nunes joined Lassiter and walked with him out of the banyan. Birdsong said Nunes had just joined his congregation and was doing a great work as an interrupter. He was anxious that Lassiter should be reconciled to Balthasar in order to aid the muleteer in his Christian life. The colporteur interlarded this with many quotations such as how good it is for brethren to dwell together in unity, blessed is the peacemaker, etc., etc.

So accordingly the two men shook hands and became friends.

The Colombian began an apology for his violence on Tilita.

"My dear Brother Carlos, as a Christian man, awakened to a new sense of duty, I crave your pardon for——"

Lassiter assured him he had it.

"And the pardon of the *hermosa señorita*——"

He had that, too; Lassiter granted it.

"Certainly the devil of temptation is wrapped up in a woman, Brother Carlos," moralized Nunes.

Lassiter agreed briefly.

"You have felt it, Brother Carlos, you understand——"

The promoter made no reply.

"So you can excuse me more readily if I went beside myself— *Mios Dios!* I swear to you, my brother, the mere memory of it—" He gave a little shiver, checked himself, swallowed. "But that is all over now, put behind me by the help of the Blessed Virgin."

"Redeemer," prompted Birdsong.

"*Si, si,*" nodded Balthasar, "a man—you cold *Norte Americanos*."

"Amen," drawled Birdsong fervently. "God has taken away your filthy lusts, brother Nunes."

"That's all over now; let's drop it," suggested Lassiter.

"*Si*, it's all over now—now I spend my time on my knees praying—praying—" He fell to shivering violently. "Ugh, Brother Carlos, it's cold work, I tell you, on your knees praying to the Blessed Virgin when you know another man holds your *querida* wrapped in his arms, kissing—hugging—fondling—and she kissing back—*Mios Dios*—It's chilly, chilly work!"

Balthasar's teeth chattered even in the heat of the sun.

The men walked on in silence for a few paces, then Lassiter said, to fill the void:

"Birdsong, you are having nice weather for your meetings."

The colporteur was beginning to thank the Lord for the weather when Nunes interrupted:

"My dear brother Carlos, may I ask as

a friend, when you are going to marry Tilita, or—do you mean to marry her at all?"

A slight perspiration broke out on the promoter's face. He went on resolutely with his conversation with Birdsong.

"However, you must look out for a bit of bad weather, Birdsong. The 'inviernillo' comes soon, 'little winter' right in the middle of the dry season."

"Because if—if you are not going to marry Tilita," shivered Nunes, staring at the mold under their feet, "my dear brother Carlos, I think it is quite wrong—*Mios Dios*, I know it is quite wrong to be nuzzling her like that—quite wrong——"

"Confound it!" cried Lassiter, wheeling on the muleteer. "Yes, I'm going to marry Tilita—I asked you to drop the subject!"

"I—I didn't intend——"

"But you do!"

"*Perdon!*"

"You are pardoned, but —— it, quit talking!"

Another silence ensued with Birdsong trudging along, staring at the promoter.

"Brother Lassiter! *Brother* Lassiter, is it possible that you are going to form a sacred union with this idolatrous——"

The promoter sweated that Nunes had set Birdsong off on one of his endless harangues.

"Yes," he said briefly.

"After I read you old Nehemiah's blessed thirteenth——"

"I have nothing to do with Nehemiah. Never heard of him till you dug up a lot of insults and told me he——"

"Insults! Out of the blessed gospels! Why, Brother Lassiter, that is a book of sweetness and peace, of love and affection——"

The promoter remained silent, abusing himself for ever going to Birdsong's meeting. He might have known it would lead to some unpleasantness.

The colporteur walked on, studying the New Yorker with his expressionless eyes.

"Do you realize, Brother Lassiter, that you are an old man and she is a child? You are an older man than I am, Brother Lassiter."

"Maybe I am in years," agreed Lassiter with poor temper, "but what's age here in the tropics—a man's as old as he feels."

"And while you are too old for her now," pursued Birdsong relentlessly, "do you realize, Brother Lassiter, in a few years she'll be too old for you?"

This last reasoning revived Lassiter's specter of old Prymoxl, a hopeless ancient at twenty-six or thereabout. What would he do when this luscious girl fell into decay?

"Of course I've thought about it," frowned the promoter.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Marry her, I told you."

"And live with her, Brother Lassiter, when she is old and flabby and brown, like her mammy?"

The words set Lassiter to probing his own intentions, and he found unflattering connotations in their depths. He wanted to defend himself before Birdsong. An argument floated to the surface showing the inevitability of polygamy in tropical countries. He thought of the Latin-Americans and the code which they accept. The whole question was a matter of geography—of where a man lived on the surface of the earth—Now—he did love Tilita—but old Prymoxl—if he could only get Tilita up North away from this heat. Then he realized that Birdsong could appreciate none of these arguments. He knew nothing of geography, of ethnology—a hard-headed bigoted rustic——

"Birdsong," he said, "I must decline to discuss so delicate a topic with any man."

The trio walked on in silence over the deep leaf mold toward the lake. Nunes shivered occasionally in the hot sunshine. Birdsong moved stolidly with his expressionless face. Lassiter was sweating. He was ashamed and sad, filled with that queer, bitter flavor of unfaithfulness in the midst of passion, of the hopelessness of permanency, of the sneer on the face of Time.

Presently the colporteur drawled—

"Brother Lassiter, have you tried to lead her into the blessed fold?"

The question set off Nunes into discordant laughter.

"*Si, si*, Brother Birdsong, he's been wrestling——"

He broke off shivering.

"No, I haven't," snapped the promoter.

"Why haven't you, brother?"

"Because—well, simply because I didn't want to."

"You don't want to!"

"No."

Birdsong stared.

"Do you want me and Brother Nunes to go and labor with her?"

"No!" cried the promoter. "No, I don't! I want her just as she is. She has a pretty faith. It—it suits her!"

"Her faith suits her!" the colporteur broke into unwonted temper. "You say it suits her—it's graceful and pretty! That's while *she's* graceful and pretty!"

"Here, Birdsong, don't go too far!"

"But when *she's* wrinkled and old, it won't be so graceful and pretty," rushed on the revivalist angrily, "then you'll take up with a new girl, Mr. Lassiter! You know you will! I know you will! You ain't got no set principles about neither women nor God! You don't care what happens s'long as it panders to the filthy lusts of your——"

A flush ran over Lassiter.

"Birdsong, you say another word——"

"I'll say this," drawled Birdsong, grimly, "I'm going to do what I can for the pore child's salvation. I don't believe you believe she's got no soul!"

"Confound you, I don't know and I don't care!" cried Lassiter beside himself. "She'll never pay any attention to you! She despises you already!"

A look of horror came over Birdsong's face.

"Mr. Lassiter, I do believe you're Anti-Christ! My God, I do believe you are! That Beast that sets on the hill with the blood of saints dripping from its jaws! You are Dagon! You're the Brute with Seven Horns! You'll swoller this girl, God ha' mercy! I'll pray God to rescue her from you! Oh, merciful God!"

The colporteur's earnestness was terrific. His face grayish. He turned from Lassiter as if from contamination, and veered northwest to circle around the lake to his missionary field. Nunes followed his teacher, shivering.

THE promoter continued to the *arbol de vaca* forest furiously angry. The colporteur had insulted him with fantastic insults, and yet, strangely enough, Lassiter found himself in a defensive mood. Birdsong's reference to the Beast, the Dragon and Dagon disturbed Lassiter. They were disturbing anathemas.

Lassiter had never attended a country revival in the southern United States. He was not aware what a treasury of maledictions the rustic evangelist heaps upon the slightest object of his disapproval.

Besides being unnerved at Birdsong's vituperation, Lassiter thought twice as to what effect the colporteur's prayers might have on the girl. Experience had taught him that the colporteur did not pray in vain. Certainly all the answers Birdsong had received were purely by chance, but it was chance grown into a sort of habit.

The thought of losing Tilita went through Lassiter's midriff with a sort of spasm of pain. He began to sweat. He was so agitated that he hurried on down to the cow-tree forest, peering through the boles long before he could possibly have seen her.

His anxiety mounted as each empty aisle stretched itself before his eyes. At last, with very real relief, he saw her standing near the tapped trees, drawing the milk into the calabashes. She was leaning this way and that, peering through the forest for him, because he was overdue.

Lassiter waved and shouted at her. So she had not been caught up in a chariot of fire, or a whirlwind, or translated away. He hurried up and kissed her far more fervently than usual. He asked with a certain concern if she were feeling well. Under the subterfuge of caressing her hand, he secretly felt her pulse. It was going a trifle fast, but under his extra gust of caressing, that was natural.

With his anxiety appeased, the promoter made himself comfortable and sat watching the girl drive an obsidian chisel into the cow-trees, then insert a joint of cane and catch a tiny rill of vaca sap. The liquid would flow for ten or twelve minutes and then dribble out. Tilita might have had a dozen canes dripping at once, but she contented herself with one. She was as unhurried in her work as the movement of the sun in the sky.

Her deliberation always spread a certain impatience through the New Yorker, and yet, somehow, it was provocative, too. As he watched her, his own nervous force always concentrated itself in a desire to sweep her into vehemence. Usually after an hour or so of such observation, her dilatoriness goaded him into one of those outbursts of fondling that occur with a certain regularity among lovers, and are based, no doubt, upon some nervous periodicity.

Lassiter was in the midst of one of these ebullitions; he had just lifted Tilita in his arms when he glimpsed the figure of a man at some distance, half hidden behind a cow-tree.

The promoter eased his sweetheart to the ground, after the manner of dignified men when discovered in an unconventionality. He stood with one arm, consciously—one might almost say conscientiously—around her waist, because not to touch her at all would admit a fault.

The newcomer proved to be Nunes. Whether he had been spying or simply passing by, Lassiter could not be sure. However, the tone of Nunes' conversation a little while before suggested the former.

A certain woodenness seized all three as Nunes passed by. To touch Tilita's waist became an effort. Likewise it was clear by the way the Colombian walked that he wanted to stop and say something, but he could find no leg to stop on. He bid fair to be carried past by dint of his own mechanism.

Then the ludicrous quality of the situation came, to Lassiter's relief. Certain lines from "Hamlet" twinkled into his mind and seemed to fit the Colombian:

> "—where be your jibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment?—quite chop-fallen——"

Then the absurdity of treating like this a man who had goaded one of his mules across the Andes thawed out Lassiter. He called—

"I thought you were going around the lake with Birdsong, Nunes?"

The Colombian whirled around and went through a great show of having seen them for the first time.

"Ah, Señor Lassiter—and the *señorita*, too!"

Lassiter removed his arm with a certain sense of relief.

"I was just thinking of you," proceeded Nunes, continuing his air of discovery, "I was just thinking of you, *señor*. I wanted to say, I do not follow my dear brother Birdsong in condemning you."

"That's very good of you, Nunes."

"Indeed, it is a matter of principle with me, *señor*. Between ourselves, religion is a lonesome thing—I don't blame you at all—I—" All this while he had kept his eyes painstakingly off of Tilita. Now he glanced at her, shivered and forgot what he meant to say, for he repeated emptily, "I don't blame any one for—for anything——"

"Are you going to assist Birdsong in his work?" inquired the New Yorker to help him out of his difficulty.

"N-no, *señor*. I—er—I am working on—I'm working on a fishing boat now—that's how I came to be passing by here—I'm working on a fishing boat now."

He was evidently manufacturing the explanation of his presence out of thin air.

"So you are going to fish?"

"*Si.*"

"Where is your boat?"

Nunes nodded vaguely up the lake.

"Are you building it yourself?"

"*Si.*"

The situation was beginning to develop into a comedy.

"I'd like to see it."

Balthasar spread a deprecating hand.

"Oh, it—it's an ordinary boat——"

"Just to see what sort of a boat you could make—Would you like a look, too, Tilita?"

The girl was curious at once to see Balthasar's boat. Both of them started toward the muleteer.

"It's a long way through the sun, *señorita*," warned the saddle-colored man uncomfortably.

Lassiter bit his lip. He was not sure whether the girl saw the joke or not.

"Oh, Tilita likes the sun—she soaks it up."

Balthasar shuddered.

"I am complimented if the *señorita* cares to see my poor boat——"

He saw they were going to follow him and he moved vaguely off up the sand.

THE promoter followed his rival with unsmiling mirth. Then, he was still more amused at Balthasar's plan out of the difficulty. The Colombian proceeded straight up the shoreline through the sun and hot sand. Necessarily they would find a boat sooner or later. Presently they did come in sight of something far away on the sand. After a little while Nunes called over his shoulder.

"I was just revamping an old *bolsa, señor.*"

When they reached it, sure enough, there was an old boat for which some one was making a sort of reed cover. Balthasar's eyes had been better than Lassiter's.

The promoter looked at it idly.

"What are you going to do with such a cover, Nunes?"

Nunes looked at the cover.

"It will keep in the fish, *señor*——"

"Keep in the fish!"

"And the waves out—in a storm, *señor.*"

Lassiter could hardly remain sober.

"If the storms get too bad, Nunes," he said gravely, "I believe I would row to the bank, if I were you—How do you weave it?"

The Colombian sat down among the bundles of reeds and cords of nipa palms and began bundling them into the long strakes of which the queer top was composed. He did exceedingly well at it for a first attempt.

The promoter complimented the muleteer's work and got away in time to keep from laughing and spoiling the farce. As he walked back down the beach, he looked back over his shoulder once or twice. As far as he could see, Nunes was still seated in the hot sand, twisting somebody's reeds and cordage, keeping up his pretense.

The promoter asked his companion how fishermen ever used a top to a *bolsa.* Tilita had never heard of a *bolsa* having a top.

When they were well away, Lassiter explained the joke to his companion. To Lassiter's surprize she seemed not at all amused.

"*Si.* I saw it was not his *bolsa,*" she answered gravely; and a little later, "He can't help creeping after me, *primo*; he told me so himself—" And she glanced back at the solitary figure in the long glare of yellow sand swinging around the lake.

After that, the incident somehow lost zest in Lassiter's own eyes. Apparently he had overrated its humor.

Lassiter and the Incan girl did not stop at the cow-trees, but continued down the lake to the temple of the sun. The lake itself narrowed to a stream in its eastern part, flowed toward the enormous façade, then turned and swept north and eventually fell into some subterranean cavity in the side of the crater.

It was in the long "f-shaped" neck of land thus cut off that Lassiter and Tilita had strung their limed cords for birds. The place was a perfect aviary, perhaps because the water cut off, to some extent, vermin and small animals that prey on nestlings.

It was a full three miles to their trapping grounds and the lovers followed the edge of the forest to escape the ardor of high noon. As they wound in and out, they caught full glimpses, and partial glimpses of the enormous façade of the *teocalla.* In the fierce white light of the meridian, the great alto relief appeared harsh, almost forbidding.

When they were within perhaps a mile of the temple, the girl paused and stared through the dancing heat, then pointed excitedly, directing Lassiter's eyes. After some blinking, the promoter made out what appeared to be a little string of ants crawling out of the main entrance. Naturally, they were priests, quite a band of them. Their almost imperceptible line of march across the façade renewed the Standill agent's shock at its prodigious reach.

Tilita was quite excited.

"Come, let's hurry down and see whose it is!"

"Whose what is?"

"*Niña.*"

"Those things aren't babies—they are priests!"

"Certainly they aren't babies — certainly—" She tried to keep from laughing, colored slightly, then controlled herself and said very sedately—

"A new *niña* has come to Motobatl—I wonder who its *madre* is?"

She stared a moment longer with the engrossed eyes of a woman over the thrill of a new life; then suddenly she seized Lassiter's arm, snuggled a moment to his side, and next instant went skipping down the beach toward the temple.

The promoter was put to it to keep up with the nymph. Within fifty yards he began to weary.

"Hold on," he panted, "the baby's parentage will keep—I fancy it's Chacala's."

Tilita gave him a backward nod.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure it's Chacala's and old Xauxa's."

"Old Xauxa's——"

"Yes, *old* Xauxa's," chirped the girl. "She must be twenty-two or maybe three."

Lassiter slowed down abruptly.

"Here," he said in a different voice, "there's no use running."

He walked deliberately to the margin of the sand where the grass kept his feet from sinking into its hot depths.

Tilita slowed up obediently and joined him.

"Why, what's the matter?" she asked, looking curiously into his face.

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all—" He made a little gesture and stood looking with a kind of ache at this brief voluptuousness before him. The child—the girl—the young woman—whatever she was, became grave, and then concerned.

"*Primo,*" she divined, with a little wrinling of her brows, "*Primo,* is—is it I—Don't you love me?"

The man bent over her in a kind of anguish. He pressed his mouth to her lips. The fragrance of the cow-tree milk surrounded him. She lifted herself to him and held him with extraordinary passion, no doubt with the *niña* motif drumming in her heart.

It was rather a bizarre performance, such a flux of erotic despair in the furnace of sunshine.

THE girl pursued the man's unhappiness with a hundred hurried questions. What was there about her that made him sad? Was she not beautiful? Her grandmother, who was a fourth Spanish blood, was beautiful. She was very like her grandmother.

They talked on about the grandmother. When asked how she knew, the girl said she could see her *abuela* (grandmother) any day that her beautiful *abuela* did not journey through the sky in the mansions of the sun.

"You can still see her?" queried the promoter curiously.

"Oh, yes, any one can—there is a little crevice in the temple. When the sun passes through the *teocalla* at sundown, perhaps my *abuela* may get out of the sun and remain for a day in the temple."

Such a quaint notion pleased Lassiter. He glanced up at the solar faculence. When he took down his eyes, dark splotches swam over the landscape.

"Do you suppose she is in the temple today?"

"Had she known we wanted to see her she would have remained in Motobatl," assured Tilita, also looking up at the sun.

Lassiter smiled at such an easy loophole.

"Of course, if she isn't in the temple—she didn't know."

"But if we want to see her she will know—dwellers in the sun know all we do and think," pronounced the girl reverently.

This closed the loophole.

"Then she will be there?"

"If we want to see her and ask her blessing."

At Lassiter's desire they decided to see the grandmother, and set out with a renewed object for the *teocalla.*

They walked quickly, and by the time the sun had declined into the west, they were walking across the vast approach to the temple. This was a pavement that fronted the temple like the piazzas before Italian cathedrals. It was a clearway paved with hexagonal blocks of tufa and fronted some three quarters of a mile of vast pilasters. Certain routes were worn in the spread of pavement where endless feet had tramped its breadth. Of these human traces worn in stone, the deepest path led to the main entrance; two more approached the two side entrances; and one pursued its way straight across the field of masonry.

Such endless ashlar work, such worn footways connoted a once vast population in Motobatl. The people gathered together in its bowl must be but a remnant of a human ant-like nest that wrought such labors. Whither had they gone? It was the query of the sphinx.

The vast façade was utterly deserted. The priests who had gone forth left no tenders. Lassiter walked on up through the heat to the great carved structure. The bases of the main pilasters were some thirty feet in diameter, but they arose to such heights they were drawn out to airiness. Looking up, Lassiter saw the ancient architect had mastered some new principle of proportion that prevented the façade from appearing to lean outward.

The whole structure vibrated with heat. The crowns of the columns far above the piazza were blurred. Heat filled Lassiter's clothes. Sweat stung his eyes and trickled down his skin like insects.

Along the outer edge of the piazza flowed the stream from the lake. North of the long pavement, a slender triangle of jungle set in between the river and the cliffs and continued to the point where the stream debouched into the palisades. From the pavement before the temple, they could just hear the faint murmur of its violence.

When Tilita passed the northern entrance of the *teocalla,* she diverged from the beaten path toward the jungle and turned to a little fault in the great façade. It was so well masked by an accident of the gigantic carving, that Lassiter never would have observed the aperture. It was evidently the result of some modern earthquake and was not designed by the sculptor because the vertical carvings on the exterior did not correspond exactly with the crack.

The swell of the scroll on the capital of one of the columns had been split in two. The solid stone radiated tangible heat when Lassiter approached it.

"Now, if my *abuela* has not gone up to heaven with the sun," began Tilita, placing her face in the aperture. A moment later—

"No, there she is."

She drew back and gave place to Lassiter. He placed his hands on two great projections of sculpture and peered through solid stone, some twenty feet thick.

As soon as his eyes grew accustomed to the softened illumination, he saw he was looking into a chamber filled with many-colored lights. He sensed the color value of the light by the nude statue of a woman that knelt in direct line with the aperture. A dozen subtle reflections from the statue bespoke the colorful illumination. Its blanched surface was touched with pinkish, mauve and pavonine tints.

The remarkable beauty of contour held Lassiter. The hair of the statue was done with actual human hair, after the fashion of the un-Hellenized Indians. The lips were scarlet. The eyes seemed to be inset of dark stones. Even a faint pilosity was suggested under the uplifted arms. In short, the sculptor of this kneeling Venus lapsed from splendid inspiration into over-detail.

Lassiter was just regretting this slight disfigurement of a genuine triumph in sculpture when the eyelids of the statue seemed to close.

Lassiter leaned forward with a slack jaw. He turned and encountered Tilita's face almost touching his.

"My God!" he aspirated. "She's alive!"

The girl gave a little restrained laugh, for she was in a holy place.

"*Certainemente*—She is my *abuela*——"

Lassiter looked back. The face of the statue was as like Tilita's as a reflection, except it was paler.

While the promoter was looking he saw the eyes were open again.

X

ALTHOUGH a marionette would have been of much service to the priests in the *teocalla*, to lend an aura of reality to the fantastic faith of the sun-worshipers, two reasons convinced Lassiter the figure was a woman. The promoter did not believe that any sculptor on Motobatl could handle the human figure with such mastery; and last, a school that could produce such art would condemn the vast baroque façade in which it was housed. The two were incompatible. The figure was a woman.

No doubt she knelt in some sort of trance. Primitive peoples are often skilled in such occultism: the *fakirs* of India, the *Aissaoui* of North Africa, the snake-dancers of New Mexico. He turned to the girl—

"How long has your *abuela* been like that, Tilita?"

"Ever since my *madre* was a tiny *niña*. Her husband, my grandfather, was drowned in the lake, so my *abuela* joined her lord in the Sun." She paused, then added, "My grandmother has thirty-nine years now—sixteen in the sun."

The number registered on Lassiter with odd emphasis. The Venus in the *teocalla* was, or had she lived, would have been, precisely his own age. By some means it had been possible to preserve a beauty such as Tilita possessed even in Motobatl.

The two lovers were now walking up the jungle in the angle between the river and the cliffs. The sound of rushing water was so pronounced as to make conversation difficult. In the jungle were their bird snares, and Tilita ran before to examine each one before Lassiter reached it. One had caught a bird, a tanager. The girl beckoned gaily for Lassiter to come and hold it while she tied on a message to the outer world.

She did it gaily, as a sort of game, because Motobatl was not a prison, but a universe to her who knew nothing else.

The two worked their way through the jungle to the bank of the river where it debouched into the cliff. The stream was about forty yards wide at the place of its disappearance. The volume of water rushed down its stony bed, struck the opposing wall, piled up, was deflected in a great whorl back on itself, then spun around a hole in the center of the flood and vanished with a gigantic sucking sound.

The whirlpool stirred a cool breeze on the sultriest days. The green fronds and flowers along its banks waved in a perpetual blast. But what always held and amazed Lassiter was the hole in the maelstrom. From the shore, it seemed a yard or two in width. It swung here and there in the wheeling waters. Its glassy funnel twisted and bent with that strange sucking sound that ranged from a ground bass to a shrill cacophony. Once every hour or so the hole would close with a sort of gulp; would ensue a confused roaring, a spouting, a coughing up of tons of water as if some monster were suffocating. After some minute or two of this confusion, the hole would suck open again and take up its spin.

All water seems alive, but the debouchment of Motobatl river with its sucking, gasping, swallowing and renewed sucking gave the most ferocious impression that Lassiter had ever observed.*

While Lassiter watched the green whorl, another bird was entangled on one of the limed cords. Tilita saw it and hurried to get it before it smeared its wings. Presently she came pushing back through the undergrowth with some sort of goldfinch in her hands. She held it aloft jubilantly for Lassiter to admire its bright orange body and black wings. She put the bird in his hands to hold while she bound the message to its leg. Tilita had a child's instinct for divination. Now, to test the fate of the message, she tossed it in the air to see what direction it would take. This infallibly showed what course the bird would fly. Lassiter entered into her little superstition and entertained her by telling what cities the bird would find in that direction. This always led to a description of trains, ships, buildings, theaters, bull fights—thus in a way, every message Tilita sent forth carried her fancy on wonderful journeys.

This time the bit of paper danced in the air and sailed toward the brink of the whirlpool. The girl darted to its rescue. She leaned so far out that Lassiter was frightened. The paper eluded her, went over a little bank of stone down to the very water's edge. Tilita was after it instantly, with a girl's limberness. She was out of sight under the bank for only an instant when Lassiter heard her shriek above the suck of the maelstrom.

The man leaped to the bank and looked over. To his relief, he saw the girl just beneath him. She was apparently in no danger at all, but was stooping and staring into the water.

"Lord, Tilita, what a turn you gave me—What is it?"

At his voice, the girl suddenly began shrieking, flew up the bank with monkeyish agility, and landed in Lassiter's arms. She cuddled there, still screaming and staring back at whatever had frightened her.

The promoter received her with the immense compassion of a lover. He began that rapturous soothing and petting which a man lavishes on his sweetheart, but which changes so unaccountably to sarcasm when the same trait appears in his wife.

"Is it a snake?"

He moved toward the river peering down The girl stayed close to him, shivering and half crying and staring backward.

"I-It's a man," she gasped at last.

At the same moment Lassiter saw it for himself. In the edge of the whirlpool floated a man. Hid head doddled and his legs waved idly in the current, but his arms were bound tightly to his side by many wrappings of cord. A loose loop of this cord had tangled in some roots and moored the body.

A moment longer Lassiter's thoughts continued on the girl.

"It's just a drowned man, sweetheart. Don't be frightened. He can't hurt you——"

"I-It's Chaca-Ch-Chacala!" And the girl sobbed irrepressibly.

Lassiter looked again. Sure enough it was the Indian who had thanked God so joyously that morning that he might rear his child in Motobatl. The cord that anchored him to the roots was the same sort of gleaming rope that Jagala, the priest, unwound from the body of the dead vicuna. It was what had drawn Lassiter's dead mules on the top of the rim; it was what Chombo Meone had preserved as a souvenir of his ghastly adventure in the Rio Vampiro.

This slow accumulation of horrors struck at Lassiter's nerves. He loosed the girl and stood looking down at the drowned man with a sort of tickling in his chest, throat and the palms of his hands. He caught hold of a wild lemon bush and lowered himself a little unsteadily to the water's edge. He drew in the cadaver by a loop. He knew quite well what he would see before he pulled it from the water. But as he lifted the body, a pressure on its stomach crushed it in like an empty sack.

Lassiter had forgot that, and now he

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* The whirlpool of Motobatl is today in danger of being transformed into a hydro-electric power plant. A public protest against such vandalism might induce the developing corporation, The Stendill Steamship Company of New York, to forego their plans to destroy a natural wonder second to none. This company is peculiarly sensitive to the criticism of tourists.

loosed it with a violent shudder. The corpse dropped half in and half out of the whirlpool.

The Stendill agent stood with a shaken heart. He stooped and washed his hands. The mystery that had formed over his party on the rim of Motobatl seemed weaving itself about them. Its inscrutability appalled him. It seemed to Lassiter that the very brilliancy of the sunshine wove a shining web to veil some murderous power. He looked down at the ill-starred Chacala, at the ashen corpse——

At that moment the whirlpool choked, regurgitated with a roar. Tons of water leaped up and flowed bankward. It caught Lassiter to his knees. Tilita cried out and reached down to help him up the bank. Chacala's body went with the ebb. The vortex opened again with its endless sucking. The body spun about the green funnel, spun about, drawing closer, and at last dived downward and disappeared, a dim greenish shadow with flying legs, as if some swimmer were stroking downward into the maelstrom, bent on self destruction.

The goldfinch was gone; whether Lassiter accidentally loosed it, or squeezed it to death in his excitement, he never knew.

THE death—the murder of Chacala—brought Lassiter a presentiment of some wide disturbance in Motobatl, and somehow, the promoter sensed that the colporteur was in the midst of it. Lassiter and Tilita set out homeward in an effort to learn more about the tragedy that had shocked them.

As the two entered the northern edge of the great plaza fronting the *teocalla*, the promoter was not surprized to see a distant figure running in from the southern boundary of the piazza toward the main entrance. At such a distance he could tell nothing about who it was; perhaps a priest hurrying to the temple for aid in some new assassination.

Both the man and the girl hurried forward past the series of immense pilasters when Lassiter saw that the person hurrying in from the south was a woman, an old woman. The promoter guessed it to be Xauxa, Chacala's wife. She ran with the labor of gravid women; her effort must have inflicted severe punishment. Apparently she meant to run straight into the temple, and now as she came, Lassiter could hear her calling the names of the priests in a desperate voice—

"Gogoma! Jagala! Quiz-Quiz! Caxas! Gogoma!"

With his quick sympathy, Lassiter hurried down, with some hope of relieving the old woman's trouble or despair, when Tilita gave a gasp and cried out:

"It's my *madre!* Oh, what has happened? Perhaps the *niña*—" She went flying down the vast tufa pavement screaming—"*Madre! Mi madre!* What has happened? *Madre!*"

Lassiter followed running. As he drew near the entrance of the *teocalla,* he saw Gogoma standing in the archway. The entrance and façade were so huge the priest was diminished to a mere brown blob guarding the passage.

"What is it, Prymoxl?" he called in the short-breathed voice of the exceedingly obese.

"My *niñas!*" screamed the old crone. "Where are my *niñas*, Gogoma? What have you done with my *niñas?*"

As Lassiter hurried toward the entrance to aid his future mother-in-law, Gogoma's brown spot swelled to a vast dripping body.

"Your *niñas* are in the sun, Prymoxl——"

"My *niñas* are dead! They are dead!" shrieked the crone. "You killed them! You!" she shrieked and rushed at him with curved fingers.

The fat man put out the bulk of his arm with unshaken dignity and allowed her to carom against it. It was shocking, the collision between the ancient crone and the behemoth. Both were fairly helpless.

"Be quiet, Prymoxl— Why do you come screaming to the temple that your children are dead— Why——"

"The man Birdsong swore it! He swore they were dead—he swore by his god!"

"He knows everything!" wailed the crone. "He works wonders to prove it! He struck the bark of my baobab and it caught fire!"

Gogoma widened his slit-like eyes and swung his bulk a little forward to stare at the virago.

"He struck *fire*—with his hand!"

"Oh, *si, si, si!*" The old woman seemed to grow weak. "Fire spurts from his hand! That proves he told the truth! My *niñas* are dead—my little *niñas* are dead—" Suddenly the old woman's wrinkled face broke into a twisting; her flabby breasts heaved to a sort of choking; her old eyes had no tears. It was the hideous sobbing of the aged. Her very repulsiveness touched Lassiter. He took the creature by the arms.

“Hush, Prymoxl. You can’t believe Birdsong! There is nothing to what he tells you—” he began, guiding her gently back in the direction she came.

“But—but it must be true,” gabbled the crone, “to strike fire——”

“Why, dear Prymoxl, what has fire to do with your *niñas?*”

“I— It is a miracle, *señor*—”

“Well, a miracle—Good Lord, what’s a miracle? Something you don’t understand— How can one thing you don’t understand prove something else you don’t understand? Don’t you see, Prymoxl, it isn’t proof at all; it is irrational; it is proving the unknown by the unknown! It is the blind leading the blind and they shall all fall into the ditch!”

Lassiter delivered all this in great heat. For a moment or two the old hag seemed to listen, but within a dozen words she lost the connection of what the promoter was saying, and started swaying first on Lassiter and then on her daughter, wailing again—

“My *niñas!* All my pretty *niñas*—dead—all—all—dead——”

She flung up her arms and broke into another paroxysm of weeping. She slumped down on the hot tufa pavement, and stared up at the sun with her desolate, contorted face. She would have beat her head against the stones, had not Tilita and Lassiter lifted her bodily and moved on homeward.

“For God’s sake, Prymoxl!” panted Lassiter under his burden. “Your old eyes deceived you! Birdsong can’t strike fire! He——”

“But I tell you, I saw him!” choked the grimalkin. “It snapped, and sputtered and burned——”

Suddenly it dawned upon Lassiter what Birdsong had done.

“Why, that was a match!’ he cried. “Anybody can do that! Here! Here!” He shook her to gain her attention. “That was a match, Prymoxl, no trick at all—none at all——”

The old hag looked at him and straightened her face somewhat.

“Can you do it?” she shivered.

“Sure, sure!” And he searched his pockets. Then he remembered he had given Birdsong the last lucifer he possessed.

“I haven’t one right here,” he said easily. “But come with me to the paddlewood, I’ll show you.

His confidence was so obvious that the old baggage got weakly to her feet, and the trio crept forward in order that Lassiter might duplicate Birdsong’s miracle and restore Prymoxl’s babies to the sun.

A certain gall-like humor seeped into the situation for the Stendill agent. Apparently he was being forced into the rôle of defender of the faith, champion of the Sun. The three walked very slowly, for Prymoxl was spent. On the way, they saw Nunes’ *bolsa* lying on the beach with its top completed.

Lassiter left Prymoxl at her baobab and went on alone to his paddlewood for the matches. The old crone was very doubtful.

“You are sure you can do it?”

“Oh, yes, I’ll butt miracle against miracle!”

She clung to his hands.

“Be sure and come back, *señor*, and show me this very night. I shall not sleep, *primo*, until you come back and show me.”

Tilita followed him outside the door and kissed him with a curious wistfulness.

“Can you really strike fire out of a tree, dear *primo?*” she asked trembling.

“Can I strike a match?” Lassiter began to laugh.

Tilita peered into his eyes, and kissed him again, slowly, doubtfully.

DEEP in the afternoon, Lassiter reached the paddlewood just in time to see Birdsong start north through the jungle. On his back were a pack of Bibles and the promoter knew that his pockets were full of the wonder-working matches. And to what unfortunate and cruel use he would put the matches! A realization of the unhappiness Birdsong would cause moved the promoter to shout at his man. The colporteur turned around and saw who it was.

“What is it, Mr. Lassiter?” he inquired briefly. “I’m in a hurry.”

The significance of the change from “brother” to “mister” was not lost on the promoter.

“I just wanted a moment, Birdsong.”

“Well, that’s all I can give you; my brothers are in trouble.”

The promoter walked up and saw a bandage around the Arkansan’s head. It shocked the agent.

“You haven’t been fighting?”

"The battles of the Lord, Mr. Lassiter—I'll have to ask you to talk fast——"

Birdsong fighting amazed Lassiter. It switched him from the main issue.

"I'll walk with you so you won't lose time. Who were you fighting?"

"The priests of Bal."

"What for?"

"They wanted to take Chacala's baby. I told 'em they couldn't because my Master had said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me.' So we had a little scrimmage. They got Chacala, but I kept his baby and now I'm hurrying back to baptize it before we hitch into 'em regular."

There was something grotesque in this stocky little man hurrying back to baptize a baby before he massed his forces for an attack on the priests of the Sun.

The promoter strode along at Birdsong's side through the heavy greenhouse smell of the jungle. He was trying to think of some means to stop this coming strife. He had a business man's hatred of violence.

"Why not arbitrate this affair, Birdsong?"

"Arbitrate it!" Birdsong gave the promoter a sharp glance.

"Yes. Is this exactly a Christian act, to be fighting and killing men and setting a whole people by the ears?"

"Mr. Lassiter," drawled the Arkansan, "do you know what old Saint Matthew says in his blessed tenth chapter?"

With a sinking heart, Lassiter admitted he was not familiar with the saint's remarks in his tenth or any other chapter. He also had the uncomfortable conviction that Matthew would bolster up Birdsong in his fire-eating and the fight would proceed. These reflections were interrupted and justified by the colporteur quoting.

"Here's what he says in his blessed tenth chapter, thirty-fourth and fifth verses, 'Think not that I have come to send peace but a sword. For I come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.' "

The promoter forsook that branch of his argument.

"What I really called to you to stop for," said Lassiter, "was about upsetting the faith of these old women with matches. You tell them their children are dead and in hell, and then strike a match and they believe it. That's a cruel thing to do, Birdsong. It's a fiendish thing to do. You might just as well have stopped in and murdered Prymoxl's fourteen children. She's wild. She's nearly crazy. She came howling and shrieking— Oh, it was pitiful, Birdsong!"

The colporteur straightened belligerently.

"Well, her children are dead and in hell!" he declared stoutly.

Lassiter knew there was no use arguing that point.

"Yes, but why tell *her?*"

"So the rest of her children'll be saved, and her own soul won't be lost, Mr. Lassiter."

He spoke briefly, as though it were a waste of words to argue with such a man.

The promoter was irritated. If he conceded Birdsong these grounds his logic was as unshakable as Gibraltar.

"But look here," cut in the agent testily, "when these old women don't believe, you prove you are right by striking a match. Now, that's a —— of a miracle—striking a match! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, running poor old ignorant women crazy by striking matches!"

"Do you say it ain't a miracle?" demanded Birdsong grimly.

"Certainly it isn't! Nobody but a mountebank would stoop to——"

"Hold on, Mr. Lassiter, don't you admit God knows ever'thing?"

With a certain uneasiness, Lassiter admitted this thesis.

"He saw I was going to need a sign and a wonder down here in Motobatl didn't He? So years before I was born, He inspired some man to make matches so when I got down here in Motobatl, I might have a sign and a wonder to spread His blessed kingdom. Ain't that just as much a miracle as me finding you in New York, and finding a rope to climb down the cliffs?"

Lassiter was already turning away. What argument could be brought to bear on a man whose profoundest conviction was that the whole universe and all the ramifications of life that had gone before were but the supers that made ready for his triumphal entrance on the stage of Motobatl!

As Lassiter turned away, Birdsong called.

"If you don't believe a match is a miracle, Mr. Lassiter, try making one."

Whether the colporteur had any innuendo tucked away in this invitation or not, Lassiter did not know. But when he reached his paddlewood he found his bags had been opened. Further search showed not a match remained. The packs of both Nunes and Birdsong revealed the same state of things. The colporteur had cornered miracles in Motobatl.

In the last light of day, the agent for the Stendill lines fumbled through his belongings hoping one match might have been overlooked wherewith to soothe the old crone in the baobab. At last, in the bottom of his pack, his fingers stumbled over his flashlight. He picked it up and flashed it to make sure it would work.*

Then he started back for the baobab with an easier heart. He had found a somewhat different sort of miracle, but he felt sure that with it he could convince old Prymoxl that her fourteen *niñas* were leading blessed and profitable lives in the bright mansions of the Sun.

XI

IT WAS so dark when Lassiter reached the baobab that he was forced to use his flashlight to find his way, thus, naturally weakening the force of his miracle. He found Tilita and her mother standing outside the baobab watching the sky. He exhibited his flashlight with rather a foolish feeling, directing its ray here and there. He even made the mistake of explaining its mechanism to Tilita the best he could.

Old Prymoxl said that Birdsong had acted quite differently. He had struck her tree with his hand and fire had flamed up; he had nothing to strike with except his hand and flames had leaped out; and as for Lassiter, making a light and no fire, a firefly could do that much—Here the talk drifted away from the flashlight, which got no further attention, although Lassiter continued snapping it on and off in an absent-minded way.

Both women were in a state of perturbation. They had been watching a light far to the north that reddened the sky. They could see glimpses of it through the trees.

Lassiter joined their observation. He found the girl's hand in the gloom, and stood looking at the light with that sense of comfort her touch always brought. Very gradually the illumination increased and spread. The jungle became filled with a reddish glow. From here and there came the call of a bird or the chatter of some animal at this untimely radiance. Strange delicate perfumes became sensible in the air from the burning of aromatic trees.

The lovers slipped their arms about each other and speculated in whispers on the origin of the light. Tilita thought it was the sun climbing down the western palisades to avenge Birdsong's impiety.

As they stood, something crashed into the baobab high over their heads, followed by a falling through the leaves. An eagle, half stunned, hit the ground within twenty feet of the watchers. No doubt it had been driven from its aerie by the flames, and had blundered into the crest of the baobab.

The huge bird filled the jungle with its shrieks when Lassiter turned his flashlight on it, and finally scuttled off through the underbrush like any turkey. From the lake came the distant laughter of loons.

A confusion of sounds so faint as to be nameless seemed gradually to arise from all over the crater. The glow increased. Presently, at some distance away, Lassiter saw three figures hurrying through the jungle toward the *teocalla*.

In the hope of finding some information, he ran toward them, calling and flashing his light. His answer was three shrieks, the whisper of an arrow past his head, and the fugitives vanished like partridges in a covert.

The wide commotion seemed to focus on the temple of the sun, and the first real knowledge of what was taking place came to the watchers from a man hobbling through the jungle from the west. The stranger carried a bow and arrow and featherwork shield of an Incan warrior. He had a bullet wound in his thigh. He stopped when he saw the women and old Prymoxl tied a cloth around the leg to stanch the blood.

The wounded man was still dazed. He told an uncertain tale of a terrible man who pointed his hand at him; came a flash of lightning and a terrific thunderbolt which struck him in the leg and brought him down.

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*This portion of Lassiter's record explains the marvels worked by Birdsong in his evangelization of Motobatl. He is credited with striking fire from stones and trees by the simple blow of his hand. This, of course, was fathered from the Motobatl Indians who at present implicitly believe this to be a fact. Bishop Langhorn, in his "Man or Myth" does not seem to apprehend Lassiter's explanation. See "Man or Myth" Bishop Langhorne, Starnes & Sykes, Richmond, Va.

His comrades broke, and the Christians charged over him after the fugitives. Then he had hobbled toward the *teocalla.*

"There was no use in staying," he shivered, "for who can fight the gods?"

The promoter and the girl each gave a shoulder to the wounded warrior and they set off toward the lake. Presently they found the jungle was full of refugees. Dozens of persons, some to the right, some to the left, overtook and passed them. It seemed all Motobatl was converging upon the *teocalla.* All were fearstruck. Each party avoided all others as if fearful of enemies everywhere.

When the promoter reached the lake, he saw scores of boats paddling in toward the temple from the north. The flying craft were silhouetted in black against the red reflections in the water.

The promoter found Nunes' *bolsa* with the queer top to it. It suddenly struck him that Birdsong had planned an attack by water, too, and the top to the *bolsa* was meant as a sort of armor. Lassiter put the soldier and the women in this little battleship of reeds and joined the flying flotilla for the last two miles. Every boat pulled for the great piazza with a sort of silent desperation.

Out of the whole throng flying templeward, not a sound was heard save the dip of oars. In the north the fires multiplied and spread. Here and there tips of flame leaped above the northern horizon flinging up volumes of smoke, red of bottom and black of top.

Toward the east, the great façade caught the crimson light. In the piazza swarmed crowds of fugitives; their continual drone came over the water, punctuated now and then with a cry, or by the sound of sobbing.

Along the strip of sand in front of the great piazza Lassiter saw three or four men running to and fro, meeting every boatload of fugitives that came ashore. When the promoter's *bolsa* drew to the sand, a little hunchback splashed into the water to pull the craft ashore, at the same time calling shrilly:

"*Señor* Lassiter, Gogoma wants to speak to you, if you will have the kindness. He has sent runners for you everywhere——"

Lassiter recognized Quiz-Quiz. Lassiter agreed, got his crowd ashore, and the four with their guide set out across the piazza.

Along a center line of the pavement stood a regiment of men in marching order. Their spears and the color of their featherwork shields gleamed dully in the crimson light. They formed a strange picture, and as Lassiter started for the *teocalla,* these men marched away toward the west.

Quiz-Quiz watched the soldiers go.

"That is our second army," he said. "The first has been cut to pieces. Nobody can stand before men with thunder in their hands."

As the army marched away, the murmur of the fugitives fell to silence. Here and there a woman shrieked and clung to one of the warriors. During the interlude, from far across the lake came the faint staccato of Nunes' automatic.

QUIZ-QUIZ led the way to the northern side entrance. Lassiter entered a hallway cut through solid stone and lighted by several tapers suspended in bowls of oil. The ceiling itself was so high it was lost in gloom. Here and there, in the long corridor, a priest moved about on some obscure errand.

The moment the great shutters clanged shut after the promoter the tumult of the piazza was muffled to a whisper. Quiz-Quiz directed Tilita and old Prymoxl to a stone bench carved into the side of the passage; then he conducted Lassiter forward and left the women sitting in the dim light, oppressed by the peculiar desolation of a vast public building.

Off each side of the hallway gave doors. One of these the hunchback opened and bowed Lassiter into a sort of audience chamber. At one end of the chamber spread a tapestry of featherwork, rising to a frieze of dull yellow metal. All the color was subdued in the light of some dozen tapers, but Lassiter could imagine how vivid would be the sheen by day.

On a dais, against this background, overflowing a huge chair, sat the naked, yellow bulk of Gogoma. The priest and his surroundings produced such a rich decorative effect that into Lassiter's mind came the immobile figure of the woman. He became dubious, after all, whether it were not sculpture. That piece of art could not be beyond the hand that lifted Gogoma's saffron bulk into such a decorative ensemble.

The air of the cavern was neither close nor stuffy, although it held the chill of all caverns. Nevertheless sweat beaded the priest's great form.

A third man was in the room, an old Indian who stood in front of what might be called the archiepiscopal throne. Lassiter's entrance caught him amid sentence,

"—fire from a tree with his hand, O holy Gogoma, and the tree burned up. Then he promised that all the children of my son's wife should live in Motobatl. And I asked how would there be room for all the children born to live in Motobatl, and he said his God would push back the walls of Motobatl, and unroll the mountains into a vast and fertile country, and—and—" Here the Indian struck his head with his hand "—and perhaps he could, holy Gogoma, for he dashed fire from a tree——

"My son, who already has his one child, took up his lance and joined this wonder-maker. But I am old, holy Gogoma. All my *niñas* are in the Sun. I must join them. I ran into the jungle. The other man, who stood persuading my son's wife, lifted his hand and hurled thunder after me. It struck off this finger—" The wretch held up the stump of a digit, still bleeding. "I turned. I ran——"

The high priest interrupted the narrative with a wave of his pendulous arm.

"You may go, Maulo."

The Indian backed away, prostrating himself at every step, and gripping the stump of his severed finger to prevent bleeding.

Gogoma then dismissed the hunchback and waited impassively until the door was closed. Then he turned to Lassiter.

"*Señor*," he said in his unruffled, furry voice, "I sent for you because I overheard your words to Prymoxl concerning miracles, and I knew, at last, another man of intelligence had come to Motobatl——"

The Stendill agent acknowledged the naked man's compliment with a slight bow.

"So I ask you, *señor*, to tell me how does Señor Birdsong strike fire and hurl thunder."

"With sulphur matches and a pistol, Gogoma." On afterthought he added—"They are usual, much less miraculous than grass and babies."

The behemoth nodded slightly.

"I knew they were usual, *señor*. What I wanted to find out was whether you possess matches and pistols?"

"No," admitted the promoter. "I had some matches, but Birdsong took them all."

"Can you make more matches or pistols, *señor?*"

"I haven't the materials, or the skill, Gogoma."

The high priest looked at Lassiter.

"Are you so poor a man, *señor*, as not to be able to make what you consume?"

"Wait, don't judge me hastily. In my country, Gogoma, each man does one thing well, and nothing else. Take my shoe, for instance—" the promoter held out his foot—"the labor of five thousand men went into that shoe. One man killed the cow, others stripped the hide, a whole tannery of men cured it, thousands of men worked over it in a shoe factory. Still another army of men grew the cotton and made the laces for the eyes. Look at the metal tip on this lace. It requires three men at machines to put the tip on the lace; that is all three men do, put tips on strings. So that is why I cannot make matches nor pistols."

Certain faint movements of the hairs of the behemoth's nose and brows betrayed the astonishment he felt at his first glimpse of the highly specialized labor of a modern factory.

"By Pachacamac!" he rumbled. "Your countrymen must be as the leaves of the jungle to have so many workers. Just see what can be accomplished with the lives of many children—your priests must let all your babies live."

Lassiter looked curiously at the mountain.

"Don't you?"

The bulk shook a jellied negative.

"That is another point I wished to speak about, Señor Lassiter."

"About babies?"

"*Si, señor.*"

The promoter stared at the vast man curiously.

"What do you want to say about babies?"

"I wanted to show you why it is impossible for all babies born in Motobatl—to live."

Lassiter's regard slowly filled with horror.

"Do you mean you——"

The bulk nodded impassively.

"Thousands every year, *señor.*"

As the promoter gaped at the vast man, slowly there dawned upon him the significance of many riddles in Motobatl—old Prymoxl's babies living in the sun—the joy of the ill-starred Chacala at the promise of life for his child—the insurrection that at this moment fired Motobatl.

It was because many babies were not allowed in Motobatl. This huge brown polyp of a priest forbade life to children. He must have destroyed hundreds, thousands of innocents. The priest swelled in Lassiter's eyes into a vast Moloch.

As all the implications of this murderous gelatinous creature struck home at Lassiter, horror tickled his throat with its nasty feather; saliva formed in a little pool under his tongue, and he swallowed sickly. The cool air of the cavern grew clammy—the murderer of thousands of babies—it reminded him of the New York apartments, where landlords forbid children—sweat broke out on his forehead.

Gogoma, who sat watching the promoter, heaved his bulk slowly out of his chair, took a waddle to the American's side, then lifted him bodily and seated him in the huge seat. The promoter's slimness occupied perhaps a fifth of it. The behemoth clapped his pulpy hands. Quiz-Quiz appeared. The priest ordered a goblet of wine and gave it to Lassiter.

The Stendill agent drank. The enormous brown man stood studying his guest's face until its color flowed back. Then he continued standing beside the archiepiscopal throne and began one of the strangest, and not the least adroit, pleas that had ever been made at that seat of power.

"Señor Lassiter," he purred, "your heart does you honor, but all men have hearts and few have brains. I wish to touch your brain.

"Look at Motobatl, *señor*, a little space, the width of a stride cramped in moveless bounds—and yet it is a place of sunlight and flowering, of amorous days and teasing nights.

"In Motobatl, *señor*, our maidens wed at thirteen years; and thereafter at each nine months or ten, their *niñas* nuzzle them with milky mouths. Within each ten months, *señor*, our population adds a half. Within thirteen years our people would be eight times as numerous as at present. During the fourteenth year, with new marriages, our people could increase three fourths our whole number; the next year it would double, and so with increasing strides to twice, thrice, fourfold—and Motobatl is but a little space, the width of a stride, imprisoned in moveless bounds.

"How could we house or feed or clothe so huge a press of life?"

The rhythm of the naked man's address held Lassiter's ear, and now the wine had restored his poise sufficiently for him to follow the thread of the argument. He was not sure whether this were a rhetorical pause or a question to be answered. But presently he said—

"Gogoma, the civilized way, the merciful way to deal with the question of population is to allow lack of food to starve—" And then the hideousness of his own solution brought him to silence. Never before had Lassiter put the conditions of modern life simply and frankly before himself.

The sweating tun agreed with an oscillation of the fat that draped his arm.

"That is true, Señor Lassiter, and for many years such was our custom in Motobatl. We allowed hunger to reduce our numbers, but hunger is much more cruel, Señor Lassiter. Moreover it demoralized our people. It made of them murderers, liars, lechers, beggars. The strong ill-used the weak. Armies rose up and fought for food and starved other armies. Starvation became part of military tactics.

"Such horrors took place that no human being could imagine it, had not our forefathers knotted all this lore in the *quippus* which you or any literate man may unknot for himself. When our forefathers saw all these terrible things, *señor*, the priests made a law that all babies, save the first, should die."

Lassiter had leaned back against the archiepiscopal chair. He nodded faintly.

"But it was a crude law. Our women hid their babies, and when found they fought the priests; they tore their flesh, and when their babies were destroyed, some sat on their babies' graves and wept, some driveled to the stars, some flung away all modesty and stalked the day as naked as I, and many died.

"And then the high priest, Vaihue, prayed to Pachacamac to send some means to take our babies to the bright mansions of the Sun and keep them there until the mothers came. One morning he awoke to find the web of the sun spread where it is today—a miraculous net, *señor*, and as the sun dips beneath the lake, babies in the web are transported to its effulgent halls—and the women are content——"

"They believe it?"

The high priest lifted his hands.

"*Señor*, they must, else they would go mad and die. All humanity must have some religion, or the horrors of life will overcome them. Pachacamac is the god of the living, not the god of the dead."

A silence fell between the men. From out on the piazza came the tumult of the people clamoring for their babies. It might have been the roaring of the sea against the coast.

"Why have you told me this, Gogoma?"

"So you can tell your friend, Señor Birdsong."

"Birdsong?"

"*Si, señor.* Tell Señor Birdsong that he may become the high priest, that his God may become the God of Motobatl, if he will only preserve the web of the sun. That alone is necessary. Señor Birdsong would make a good high priest. He is hard and cruel, and unmarried. He seems to have no desire for marriage."

"Why shouldn't a priest marry?"

"Because no man can have children of his own and attend the sacrifices."

The South American agent sat in the huge chair and brooded over this strange request. He looked at the sweating brown man.

"Birdsong would not listen to me, Gogoma."

"Will he not listen to reason?"

"No—he goes by a book."

"Does his book permit babies?"

"Yes, it is a book for an open country—and a cool country."

"But is Birdsong not a priest in his own country?"

"No, just a follower."

The naked ecclesiast shook his head slowly.

"Such is the danger of lifting ignorant men to the priesthood—they believe what they teach. They serve the letter of the law, not its spirit. They serve the god of the dead, not the god of the living——"

The high priest seemed to shake off some settling despondency.

"Go to him, *señor*—all you can do is to go to him and explain——"

"He will probably kill me."

"Very likely, my brother—I will pray——"

"To whom?"

"I, Gogoma, the high priest, will pray, my brother."

Lassiter got slowly out of the priestly seat. He felt queerly weak. It seemed hardly worth while to walk out of the door, or to speak to Birdsong, or to do anything. Somehow Gogoma's talk had stripped the veil off of things that were best left veiled. He walked out into the corridor.

On the stone bench, Tilita still sat. The taper over her head had guttered out.

Somehow the sight of the maiden seated at the door of the temple melted some frozen thing in Lassiter's heart. Suddenly, he understood why women, always, were the religious moiety of mankind. They have so much more at stake.

A great tenderness ached in his throat. He ran to her and caught her in his arms. He kissed her with an intolerable compassion on her womanhood. His tears dropped on her neck and bosom.

The girl herself sobbed in sympathy, not knowing why.

Beside them, old Prymoxl snuffled, thinking of her *niñas* in the Sun. She was no obstacle to their fondling. So much of the masculine had she held in her that she was epicene; so many children had she borne that her personality was scattered; she was life's point of departure, an old caravanserai without traffic, deserted——

Here and there through the vast dimly lighted corridor moved a priest of the Sun on some obscure errand.

XII

AS LASSITER crossed the great piazza on his strange mission as an advocate of infanticide, he was amazed that he had not discovered long before the existence of that practise in Motobatl. Every incident he could now recall pointed so simply in that direction. On every hand he had heard the sun myth, which veiled the custom with the thinnest drapery.

Moreover Lassiter had known that almost every barbarous people indulged in the practise: China, Japan, India, the South Seas; the history of the Jews record it; America feels prenatal infanticide; France taxes childlessness. And yet with the solution of mystery of Motobatl written across every page of history, Lassiter had not seen it. The promoter was chagrined at himself.

It was dawn now, and as the gray light

increased, the glare of the burning trees gave way to an atmosphere filled with smoke. The vast walls of the crater were hidden and revealed by the accident of the smoke. It hung over the lake in long draperies that stirred with the breath of day. It was aromatic with the odor of unknown resins, and now and then, by some fortuity of the breeze, he obtained a view of the whole of Motobatl, a vast censor among the Andes.

On his way westward down the beach, Lassiter paused for a moment beside the net of the Sun to speculate for the hundredth time on its enigma. This time he attacked the problem with a certain freshness, because the discovery of infanticide suggested the net must be just as simple if he could only lay a finger on the clew.

So he stood studying the net, reviewing critically every incident connected with it—Chombo Meone's tale; his own mules on the rim; the vicuna; the murder of Chacala; the winding of the unearthly cord about the victims; and at last, the ghastly dried shells of the murdered. And alongside this there popped into his mind the immobile figure kneeling in the cavern. But certainly that had nothing to do with the others——

No doubt it was all perfectly simple—as simple as infanticide. When it was explained to him, he would be just as chagrined, just as amazed at his own stupidity— He went over the phenomena minutely — rope — glue — sheep — mules — men——

His brain seemed on the very fringe of the solution. He could feel the answer formulating. Just one more tiny advance. An adumbration came, a sort of indistinct horror. It grew clearer. He had it! The truth of the net was—then, just as he was deciphering the shadowy solution, there came that miserable sensation as if something just in sight had silently faded. He felt as if something inside his head which was opening, had gently closed. Such profound exasperations are familiar to every thinker.

Lassiter stodged forward fighting obstinately to recapture the flair, the mental connection. But it was gone. That cell of his brain was closed and lost; that picture in his mind was faded and vanished. He tramped on still struggling. There was something sinister, almost tragic in this near-illumination, in this warning he had almost heard, and which had died in silence.

The promoter moved on toward the tumult in the west. That noise he heard was swinging Birdsong into power, it was transforming an Arkansas squatter into an equatorial hierarch. For the first time it dawned on Lassiter that he was witnessing one of those marvels of history that crowned Brooke in Borneo, that created Clive, Cortez, and the Emperor of the Sahara— For the first time he suspected himself of having overlooked an opportunity to study at first-hand one of those men about whom history gossips.

It was with some idea of rectifying his oversight that Lassiter hurried forward, when, some two hundred yards down the beach, a group of men appeared palely drawn in the midst of the smoke. They were marching up the beach toward Lassiter, and at the head of the column, under guard, walked a man with his hands tied behind him.

The New Yorker moved on down to meet them, not knowing quite who were the captors nor who the captured. He peered through the smoke, trying to make out to which side the god of battles leaned, when to his amazement, he saw the prisoner was Nunes.

The promoter stopped stock still at this abrupt reversal of what he had fancied. These, then, were Gogoma's men who had captured the Colombian and his automatic. What the warriors of the sun would do with Nunes was too easy to guess. Thought of the Colombian being cast into the net horrified Lassiter. Certainly the muleteer was no favorite with the New Yorker, nevertheless he decided he would use his influence to obtain clemency.

The promoter was about to turn back to the temple, when still other soldiers streamed into sight out of the smoke; long ranks of spearmen, slingers, archers, followed by women and children in the van. The warriors wore the feathered armor of the Incans, and their polychrome hues made a fine show of color through the drifting smoke.

A spearman in front lifted his weapon, waved it like a long baton, and suddenly the whole throng broke into singing. This was extraordinary, but to Lassiter's further amazement, he recognized one of the colporteur's songs. The Indians chanted it like thunder:

"Red gushed the tide from Jesus' side,
He bled for me, so red for me;
Wide flows the flood of Christian blood,
Let us bathe in that go-o-ory sea."

These words were sung to the dismal tune of Old Hundred, but instead of adhering to the major scale of the Anglo-Saxon, the Indians fell into their own wierd mode. It filled jungle and lake with an unutterable melancholy. It was the folk music of an imprisoned people, of infanticides wounded to death by their own vital pressure.

In the midst of this chanting army, the promoter caught sight of Birdsong. The colporteur was not singing, but was threading his way to the fore ranks of his victorious army.

THE whole situation was incomprehensible to Lassiter. He hurried down to intercept the chieftain. A number of lances made way to admit the promoter to their ranks. The song continued without interruption.

Birdsong glanced up and nodded at Lassiter in the midst of the chanting. The colporteur's face was ashen under its tan, and there were lines in it that Lassiter had never seen before.

The Stendill agent waited impatiently for the singing to cease, curious to know what had brought Nunes to handcuffs. The Colombian was in no wise downcast. He strode along among his guards, chin up, swinging his green velvet shoulders from side to side. From a side view, Lassiter thought he was smiling. The whole affair might have been a play in which Balthasar refused to take his part seriously.

After many stanzas of the scarlet song were finished, Birdsong spoke first. He sounded less as if he were starting a sentence, than continuing aloud some troubled train of thought.

"I want to do what's right and merciful, Brother Lassiter. It's my hope and prayer—I want to act exactly like Christ would——"

The promoter surmised this referred to Birdsong's future treatment of the priests of the sun.

"The difficulty is, Christ set you no precedent there, Birdsong; He lost, you won."

"I was talking about Brother Nunes, Brother Lassiter."

"Oh—I was wondering about Nunes. That's the queerest reverse I ever heard of—Did he run from the enemy?"

"Oh no, no indeed!" cried the colporteur. "He was the lion of Judah, Brother Lassiter; he saved my life twicet from the priests of Bal!"

"Then what *did* he do?"

Birdsong tramped silently for several minutes. Once he lifted an arm and wiped the corner of his eyes with the back of his hand. Finally he said—

"He misused the power God gave him, Brother Lassiter."

"The automatic?"

"The matches."

Lassiter looked at the colporteur, then at the muleteer trying to construe this information into sense. He repeated the word, "matches" carefully, as if some secondary meaning might pop out of it.

"I mean, Brother Lassiter, that Brother Nunes with his matches convinced some of the wives of my men that he was an angel from heaven, and he—he—didn't use them right, Brother Lassiter——"

"You don't mean——"

And the promoter broke off with a slack jaw.

And yet, now that it had happened, it was as much like Nunes as his own picture. Just what one might have expected. But it was such a fantastic sacrilege!

"The men who are guarding him are the husbands," explained the colporteur somberly.

Lassiter looked at the seven guards around the gallant.

The muleteer himself maintained his jaunty swagger. Now and then he glanced around at the women in the rear ranks. Once he caught Lassiter's incredulous eyes. He waved gracefully, called a brilliant "*Buenas dias, señor*," and smiled.

It was evident that his position at the head of the column as prisoner, the crimes he had committed, and whatever punishment was in store for him, preened his vanity. He was by far the jauntiest man in the ranks. His call to Lassiter aroused a twitter among the women in the van.

"What are they going to do with him?" asked Lassiter at length.

"Chuck him in the net, Brother Lassiter," the colporteur nodded woodenly up the lake.

"Birdsong, you are not going to allow that!"

"It's the law of Motobatl, Brother Lassiter."

"What if it is!" cried Lassiter in horror. "You are in charge of Motobatl now. You've won!"

" 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's,' Brother Lassiter."

"But, man!" cried the promoter aroused. "I tell you it's horrible! You should have seen Chacala. He was a shell, a crust. I fished him out of the whirlpool—" The New Yorker shivered. "Make 'em shoot the poor devil with his own automatic, Birdsong."

The colporteur tramped on with the thick skin of his brow corrugated into three wrinkles. It was the cool of the morning, but sweat beaded his face.

"Brother Lassiter," he said at last, "this is the worst stump I ever plowed into—I don't know what to do— The Good Book says that David was the same kind of a man that Brother Nunes is—Uriah's wife—and David was a man after God's own heart—Aye me, Brother Lassiter—I dunno what to do——"

He crooked his forefinger and flung the water from his forehead with a plowman's gesture.

The marching men rounded the point of palms and came into sight of the huge façade of the temple. Over the line ran a breathing, an audible tribute to the wonder and hugeness of that façade wrung even from an apostate army. They were in sight, also, of the cumulus which hid the sinister net of the sun.

Lassiter looked at it with dry lips. He could feel the muscles of his legs as distinctly as if he himself were to be thrown onto its limed and twisted ropes. He made one last mental effort to fathom the secret of the contrivance, and for the last time, failed.

The muleteer strode ahead in his soiled green jacket, and all that Lassiter knew of that gay, irresponsible roué revisited his mind. He thought of the *piquante* girls in Quito, of the Indian girls along the trail, of the fact that he, Lassiter, had persuaded Nunes to come down into the crater, of how Nunes had helped carry him down the precipice, and of how they had fought over Tilita. And as he stared at the condemned man, Lassiter realized that something in his heart had wrapped itself around this capering irrepressible animal. He could hear the fool saying—

"*Señorita*, when I look at you, I have a yearning, a wild, uncontrollable——"

Poor devil, perhaps he had!

* * *

AT THE foot of the hummock the guards halted their prisoner. The army filed past and took up a semicircle around the executioners and the condemned. Lassiter glanced at the great piazza. It was deserted save for a shapeless brown form in the great entrance. It was Gogoma waiting for Birdsong's men to come and slay him.

Nunes mounted to the top of the hillock and struck a fine pose against the sky. His eyes barely rested on the net, then swept over lake and palisades to the peaks beyond. Lassiter thought again how he had persuaded the Colombian to come down into the crater.

"*Señors*," said the captive to the archers, "if you will permit it, I would like to jump into the net myself with free hands. It is for the sake of the *señoras*. I have friends—" he made a graceful gesture toward them—"who would prefer to see me go a freeman——"

Birdsong walked up the little acclivity and stood beside the muleteer. The way he laid his hand on Nunes' shoulder made Lassiter realize there was a bond between the muleteer and the son of the moonshiner that he had never suspected. He was much the same size and build as Balthasar. Lassiter thought he was going to cut the rope. Instead, Birdsong said very simply:

"Soldiers of God, this brother ain't ready to die. I know it is the law in Motobatl for adulterers to be thrown into the net, so I'm going in Brother Nunes' place."

A gasp of horror, a breaking out of protest along the ranks. Men left the line and came running in with dissuasions.

The colporteur waved them all down.

"I tell you!" he cried in his nasal voice, "Brother Nunes ain't ready to appear before his God! He'll go to hell shore, forever and ever! He saved my life twicet. He stood by me when every man-jack left me——"

A woman wailed.

"But Gogoma will kill our *niñas!*"

"No, he won't sister. Our men have won. If I am necessary for the salvation of Motobatl, you know God ain't going to let nothing happen to me in that net!"

"But, *señor*, nobody ever has escaped——"

"And nobody ever come out of a lion's den neither till Dan'l done it; and nobody ever walked through a f'ary furnace, neither, till the three Hebrew children done it. Don't you know our God that made Motobatl, an' all it contains, can save me from a few ropes and some glue if He wants to?"

Lassiter was by his friend's side.

"Listen, Birdsong," he begged, "you are not fooling with matches now. Don't risk that —— thing— Turn Nunes loose!"

"Brother Lassiter, if God had to crucify His only begotten Son to save the human race, don't you know there ain't no sich thing as jest turnin' a sinner aloose? Sin's got to be paid for."

The fundamental difference between the two men angered Lassiter for the last time.

"But how? Why? What good does suffering do? —— it, man, there's no connection between one man's guilt and another man's suffering. It's not only unjust, its shameful, its revolting! Stop! Stop! I tell you a man in a rage wouldn't kill a friend because his enemy had— For God's sake, Birdsong!"

"——a debt——"

Birdsong was striding down to the net.

"But hell *isn't* a debt!" yelled Lassiter. "Punishment is simply corrective or revengeful— Don't— Don't go on that——thing—your whole —— scheme is as immoral as——"

Suddenly the promoter gave up howling and ran to Nunes, whom his captors had reluctantly loosed.

"Get your automatic, Nunes!" he yelled in the confusion. "Those priests are not going to work their burning trick on Birdsong!"

Nunes motioned toward one of the spearmen. Lassiter jumped at the man.

"Gimme that gun!"

He had it before the Indian could assent or object. He thrust it into the Colombian's hand and hurried with him down to the water's edge.

"Now, sit right here, with that gun drawn! Shoot any —— fired thing you see move!"

By this time Birdsong was in the limed meshes. He was trying to walk across the viscous strands. When he pulled up a foot, the cord untwisted but stuck and stretched. As he tried to go forward with both feet fast, he lost his balance and his hands went down. He shoved with one hand and tried to loose the other. At every straining effort other parts of his body inevitably touched the viscid tubes. He seemed to be pulling the unearthly ropes up over himself. It held his clothes and the struggles of the gigantic little man ripped the seams. His clothing slowly parted and tore off. The stuff laid its grip on his white skin. He was prone with one arm outspread and the other twisted under him. His efforts distorted the net. His muscles balled up. The thing gave to his efforts. He struggled against nothing.

Lassiter could endure it no longer.

"Get a pole," he shouted, and as nobody made a move, the promoter leaped up and sprinted over the little rise toward a bamboo that had drifted ashore.

Then he realized that all the army were kneeling toward the rising sun droning the prayer that Tilita had taught him.

The promoter reached the pole. He flew back up the slope. The net was empty. He rushed to Nunes who sat, with automatic still outstretched, staring white-eyed at the empty strands.

"Did he get out, Nunes?" chattered Lassiter. "Did he get out? Where is he?"

He shook the man with the poised firearm. Nunes closed his mouth, wet his lips and stared at Lassiter.

A great horror came over the promoter—

"Nunes—my God!—where is he?"

The Colombian seemed dazed.

"*S-Señor*," he chattered.

"Didn't you see him? Didn't you see what went with him?" Nunes shook his head.

Lassiter looked at the net; then back at Nunes.

"I—I—took my eyes off just a second —only an instant——"

"God in heaven, man, what for?"

Nunes moistened his lips and suddenly fell to sobbing—

"I—I was looking at a w-woman——"

XIII

FOR upward of an hour, perhaps two hours, Birdsong's men remained near the hillock, moving about aimlessly, talking in whispers, staring at the net wherein their leader had disappeared. Some wept. The sun arose and stretched long fingers of light through the smoke. At last, tired out with fighting, marching, and lack of sleep, apprehensive of the priests, and leaderless, the colporteur's disciples began to dribble away by twos and threes. The last to stay by the mound were three women—Motobatl's Mary Magdalene, Mary and Joanna— And so Birdsong's mission ended.

The promoter watched them go with gray thoughts. Although he had never liked the colporteur; although throughout their adventure together, he had felt the revivalist was a fanatic, following the craziest cosmogony, still, his abrupt taking off left the Stendill agent troubled and shaken and somehow aimless.

A breeze sprang up out of the east and cleared away much of the smoke. It stirred lines of silver over the blue water and blurred the reflections of the peaks. The sunshine grew warm. Lassiter got slowly to his feet and walked down the beach toward the great piazza. Lying in front of the immense pavement, he saw Nunes' *bolsa* with its queer top. It was a discarded little battleship that would never fight for its designer. It still lay half-drawn out on the sand where Quiz-Quiz had pulled it. Little waves broke against its stern with a continual sobbing.

The great piazza lay cool in the morning shadows. It was entirely deserted. From the north came a barely heard sucking and choking of the distant whirlpool. Lassiter thought of Birdsong, a gray cadaver, spinning round and round and taking a last plunge. Perhaps the body was spinning at this moment, or would soon, or had. The promoter felt profoundly weary, old, burned out.

He was turning south, with some vague intention of going back to his paddlewood and lying down, when he saw the bulk of Gogoma push out of the jungle toward the north. The high priest carried a basket on his great arm and Lassiter knew it held birds.

The Stendill agent was about to turn on away when the behemoth made a gesture asking him to wait. Lassiter walked over and leaned against one of the vast pilasters. The fat man waddled toward him with his breech clout entirely concealed in rolls of flesh. The blue heron feather fluttered in the breeze.

A disgust came over Lassiter at the thought of waiting and talking with the priest so soon after Birdsong's murder. He was about to go on after all, but a second thought came and told him that it had been war, that Gogoma was again in power, that he, Lassiter, was doomed to spend the remainder of his life on some sort of terms with the murderer— It was simply a question of policy. After all, the whole of life was a question of policy——

So Lassiter remained leaning against the pilaster, one foot cocked up against its cylindrical surface which was flat in relation to so tiny an object as a human figure.

The fat man came up sweating profusely. He stopped with a slight gesture of salutation.

"A very pretty morning," he puffed and gave his head a shake that sent down a little rain.

"You have a lot of birds."

"I got them off your limes, *señor*. You chose an admirable place." He looked up at the rim of the crater high above, "I wonder if your message will ever bring help?"

Lassiter did not look up.

"I don't know— It doesn't make much difference."

The behemoth regarded him gravely out of pin-point eyes set in the expanse of brown face.

"You are thinking of your friend, *señor*."

"Certainly."

Gogoma meditated.

"Well—it is true. It makes little difference who comes or goes— We are but scum caught in the Web of the Sun—" He paused a time and finally added—

"Still we try to hold our places——"

The promoter stood moving his foot against the surface of the pilaster with a slight nervousness. The movement made about as much sound as the murmur of the whirlpool to the north. At last the New Yorker asked the question forever nibbling in his mind,

"How did you kill Birdsong in the net, Gogoma?"

The wide face was unmoved by so much as a quiver.

"I did not kill him, *señor*."

"Your men, then?"

"They had nothing to do with it, *señor*."

Lassiter saw the priest meant to reveal nothing of the terrific mechanism of the net. There was no need trying to probe by indirection, for Lassiter already sensed the behemoth's mind was subtler than his own. To his surprize the priest proceeded.

"If Señor Birdsong had greased his hands and feet he could have walked on the net without fear of sticking. That is the method we priests use in collecting our alms—it is a great miracle. The people flock to see it. It refreshes their faith in other things they know nothing about."

Lassiter was moved to smile, but his smile flickered out in the aura of Birdsong's death.

"It really helps prove those things, *señor*," proceeded the priest gravely. "Belief in the Sun is the truth for my people; without it they could not exist."

Lassiter leaned against the pilaster musing and presently said:

"I dare say that's right. Religious truth is any theory with sufficient coherence to satisfy man's inquisitiveness, and yet at the same time offer him sufficient inducement to bear the ills of life."

The behemoth opened his slit-like eyes. Like all men, he was vastly impressed with the promoter's wisdom because he had repeated his own theory in slightly different words.

"*Señor*, you are the man I have been praying to come to Motobatl."

Lassiter regarded him curiously.

"You must become high priest in the temple of the Sun."

Lassiter did not know whether this were a jest or not.

"I am in earnest, *señor*. I have prayed for such a man. None of my acolytes can take my place. Neither Jagala nor Quiz-Quiz. They do not comprehend that the temple is for man and not man for the temple. Until you came, I was the only skeptic, the only disbeliever in Motobatl. I alone could administer the holy rites purely for the benefit of my people, without the corruption of faith or credulity or idolatry or useless sacrifice."

"You really want me to become high priest?"

"Indeed I do!"

Lassiter stood staring at this monstrous proposal, and yet as he thought it over, he perceived that its monstrosity was really superficial. Back of it lay a genuine love for his people.

NOR were Gogoma's motives entirely without parallel in Lassiter's own experience. In America Lassiter recalled conversations with ministers who frankly admitted that while, personally, they did not accept all the tenets of their churches, still they preached them to their congregations, because the business man, the professional, the man around town were not prepared to receive the recondite learning of the study.

Also he had heard laymen admit that they could not allow their minister to know exactly what they believed because he led too secluded a life to receive the full glare of truth such as they found in the market place. Such stewardship of spiritual values always impressed Lassiter as a beautiful and a thoughtful attitude.

Now he was a little surprized to find himself shocked over the same condition in Motobatl. Moreover, the notion began to appeal to him. It touched the streak of romance, of play-acting that had always lain at his heart. It promised his life a certain dramatic completion—high priest, hierophant in the hugest and most ornate temple of the earth.

"Would it be necessary for me to become an acolyte until your death?"

The high priest raised a pulpy protesting hand.

"You would be installed at once, within a week. I wish to devote the remainder of my life to my own immortality, brother."

The promoter looked at him curiously.

The high priest touched the brightly colored birds in his basket.

"Immortal—the birds?"

"*Señor*," intoned the high priest solemnly, "only one thing is immortal on earth, and that is beauty. Our philosophies change with the years, history is a forgetting, science is man's last guess, but a work of beauty, *señor*, lives on and on. It is immortal——"

Lassiter had never before seen the high priest aroused.

"What do you do?" he asked curiously.

"I paint with feathers."

"Did you do the tapestry in your audience chamber?"

"That was my master Vaihue's work. If you love color and form, Señor Lassiter, if the rainbow bent over your mother's couch when you were foaled, then come——"

He started moving his bulk impulsively toward the great entrance, then hesitated and stopped. It was the only impulsive movement Lassiter ever saw him commit.

He reconsidered.

"No, there will be time after you become the high priest, brother. We will hurry and ordain you high priest tomorrow or next day, but, *señor*, to look at my picture, you should have preparation, you should fast—and pray."

Sweat dripped from Gogoma under his emotion. A condition of the priesthood suddenly came into the promoter's mind.

"Didn't you tell me, Gogoma," he asked suddenly, "that priests were not allowed to marry?"

"*Si, señor.*"

Then the fat man interpreted the look that crossed Lassiter's face and went on persuasively:

"*Señor*, what a man loves in a woman is her loveliness. Touch it, and it wilts like a flower, but, *señor*, if—if you could hold the woman you love in perpetual youth, then—then—" the behemoth held up his finger and spread his pin-point eyes— "then, your love becomes immortal. She becomes part of your immortal idea, and the sense of sight is the sense of touch infinitely refined——"

This last, uttered in a tone of revelation, meant nothing at all to the promoter. He took his foot down from the pilaster and moved southward toward Tilita.

"After all, I can not become high priest, Gogoma. I shall marry. Not immediately, not so soon after Birdsong's death, but I shall marry."

Signs of animation faded from Gogoma's bulk. He fell in at Lassiter's side and waddled in unison to his step. Dwarfed by their surroundings, the two men moved southward across the vast piazza.

On his homeward walk Birdsong's tragedy reenveloped Lassiter. The promoter attempted to free himself of it. He told himself he had not loved the colporteur. They were hardly friends; they had never agreed on any point, and finally had quarreled and separated. But his sense of personal loss continued. Somehow Birdsong's taking-away changed the whole atmosphere of Motobatl for him. The colporteur had somehow spread an air of ordinariness, a feeling of the conventional moral values over the whole crater. Now Lassiter felt adrift.

As he approached the baobab the odor of garlic and pepper drifted to his nostrils through the jungle. When he stepped into the clearing he saw old Prymoxl stirring at a huge pot on her oven, while near by lay heaps of plantains, guavas, palm cabbages and red bananas. On the other side stood calabashes of palm wine and cow-tree milk. The tang of wine, fruit and pepper smelled like a banquet.

Lassiter stood in the edge of the open space looking at these preparations when the crone saw him. She proved in the height of good spirits. All her bedraggled gaiety had returned. She gave a little croak of pleasure at seeing Lassiter, dropped her work and bundled over to embrace and kiss her future son-in-law. The embrace was close and pervasive. Lassiter could feel the dry wrinkles of her lips, her flaccid dugs and her protuberant abdomen. Her breath stank of wine and garlic.

For the first time, the promoter realized that his mother-in-law was merely an old Indian slattern living in a tree. Birdsong's death, somehow, had given her this new objectivity. The colporteur was no longer in existence to rate the old slattern as an immortal soul on equality with Lassiter and himself.

Prymoxl patted the promoter gleefully on the back.

"Well, *yerno* (son-in-law), he is dead!"

The Stendill agent nodded mechanically.

"Wasn't it droll—died on the very spot where my *niñas* were lifted to the sun—after he had worried my heart out of me—well, it proves Pachacamac is stronger than his God and my *niñas* are safe."

She cackled maliciously at this vindication of her faith.

The promoter released himself gently.

"Your *niñas* are quite safe, *señora*."

"And he will no longer oppose your marriage with my Tilita?"

"No— He is gone."

"And good riddance!" The grimalkin paddled back to her work well content. Her babies were safe; her daughter was about to be married; her religion had triumphed; old Prymoxl's universe was again pat. She took a gourd of palm wine and sipped it with a smacking.

"Well—" she soliloquized, "he who mocks the gods mocks himself. Old Gogoma taught me that when I was a *muchacha*."

Here she smacked complacently and recalled another *cliché*—

"The gods give us life, and if we do not serve them they take our life away, eh, *yerno*——"

She drained off her gourd, and began a great stirring.

There was something supremely ironic

in this old baggage repeating with such gusto the high priest's veiled cynicisms. By good fortune she dropped into her more usual strain.

"Ah, well, I shall have a fine *yerno*, and he will get me a fine grandson to hold on my knees—as white as a Spaniard—perhaps two—perhaps three—perhaps the priests will allow all of Tilita's *niñas* to remain here in Motobatl— They have enough in the Sun, *señor*, quite enough——"

The palm wine was making her optimistic. She looked around at Lassiter in the midst of her garrulity.

"Why, what is the matter?" she cried amazed. "This is a fine way for my *yerno* to look when he is about to be married——"

The promoter realized that his face betrayed the horror with which the old woman's words had filled him. Only her gabbling had brought to him personally the abomination of the sun-worship, that his own children, the fruit of his and Tilita's love would be——

"What is it? What is it?" cried the ancient in growing alarm. She dipped her gourd and shuffled toward him, spilling wine as she came. She watched him drink it with satisfaction.

"Holy Pachacamac, but you are not at all gay for a *novio* (bridegroom), *señor*. You are not ill?"

He denied all illness, and when she pressed him to know what was the matter, he hesitated for an explanation that would conceal his thoughts.

"Gogoma has asked me to become the high priest."

The old woman stepped back. Her mouth dropped open.

"The high priest!"

"*Si, señora.*"

"But—but a priest can not marry——" Her voice was an aspirate.

"No——"

"Then—then my daughter—my little Tilita——"

Her words wavered off. Lassiter saw that she was about to fall into the shocking grief of the aged. He put an arm around her.

"It's just an offer, *señora*—just a proposition——"

The old baggage stood staring up at him, drawing short uneven breaths.

"Oh, *señor*, my daughter—my little *hija*——"

Her fine old eyes grew dark and fear-struck.

"Merely a proposal, *señora*, a tender, an overture," he repeated emptily.

The old woman looked around her with dazed eyes at the boiling pot, piles of fruit and jars of drink. The Stendill agent stood for a space and then, in exquisite discomfort, he touched his sombrero, wished her a "*buenas dias*" and moved away toward his paddlewood on self-conscious legs.

When a turn in the jungle mercifully shielded him from Prymoxl's eyes, the Stendill agent paused to wipe his face. He was surprized at the finality the old woman had construed into his first hint that he should become priest of the Sun. He had not realized how mandatory in the lives of the Incans was the slightest suggestion from the temple.

As he walked slowly toward his tree home, a curious thought came to him— Had Birdsong lived and completed his revolution, he could have married Tilita with a clear heart. He began to suspect that he had lost far more than the rebel army in the colporteur's death.

WHEN Lassiter reached the paddlewood, he saw Nunes seated just outside his cubicle on one of the little benches cleaning his automatic. The Colombian had the firearm in pieces beside him wiping each piece with a greasy rag. As he wiped, he whistled daintily and now and then he lifted and squinted through the barrel to admire the shine of its rifling. His wrists were still ringed with blue bruises where he had been tied.

The promoter nodded to the gallant without speaking and walked on into Birdsong's cubicle. The Colombian watched him and called after him cheerfully.

"I've taken everything Señor Birdsong had of value, Señor Lassiter—to pay for my mules."

Sure enough the colporteur's packs lay scattered here and there in the cubicle, quite gutted. Bibles and his private papers were flung over the nipa matting. Among this wreckage, Lassiter saw the bundle of letters which Birdsong had written to his wife. The promoter picked these up together with one of the Testaments.

Nunes continued talking cheerfully through the thin partition.

"You can't fancy my surprize, *señor*,

when I looked down and saw he was gone. I was quite startled, and I assure you, *señor*, it requires no small thing to startle Dom Pedro Balthasar Nunes."

The promoter slipped these keepsakes of the dead man into his pockets with some vague idea of forwarding them to Mollie Birdsong. There was something pathetic in the worn little Testament which Birdsong had toiled to bring to Motobatl.

"And do you know, *señor*, I've wondered what could have whisked a man away like that when he was stuck so tight; and think, there was absolutely nowhere for him to go—and he went so quick—I'm a hard man to puzzle, *señor*, but this puzzles me——"

Lassiter came out buttoning the flaps of his pockets. The muleteer looked up curiously.

"It's a Bible and a package of letters."

The muleteer nodded.

"The reason I took everything, Señor Birdsong had," reexplained Nunes apologetically, "is because I need it and you don't, Señor Lassiter. As a rule I act generously, but now I can not. In the war you played the wise part—a friend to both sides, but I made enemies—of both sides—" he shrugged lightly— "quite *declassé*."

"What are you going to do?" asked Lassiter curiously.

The Colombian began reassembling the firearm with the expertness of much practise.

"I will try to get what I want, *señor*," he glanced at Lassiter with a smile that lifted his glossy mustache and showed his thick red lips. He arose, drew some greasy cartridges from his greasy pockets and clicked them into the automatic.

"Nunes," said Lassiter gloomily, "you are going to get yourself thrown into the net after all."

The muleteer laughed aloud.

"My dear *camarado*, to hear us talk any one would think I was the bridegroom and you the unhappy suitor. I swear you haven't the face of a man who will act as *novio* to the sweetest girl in Motobatl tonight."

"I'm not."

"Not what?"

"Not going to marry Tilita tonight."

Balthasar paused in addressing his pistol.

"You are not going to marry Tilita tonight?"

"No."

"You—are-not-going-to-marry-Tilita-tonight?" he spaced his words with blank incredulity.

The New Yorker made a gesture.

"Why?"

The promoter stood looking at his muleteer.

"Well, I'll tell you— You're the only man I can tell since he's gone. It's this—this sun-worship stuff— It's merely a system of infanticide. Why, Nunes, this —— place is simply a huge baby farm—It's hellish, it's diabolical— It's—" He broke off with a shudder and stood staring.

The Colombian was nodding a courteous, "*Si, señor*," at each of these denunciations. Now at the interruption he waited a moment and finally prompted amiably.

"But you haven't said why you weren't going to marry, *señor?*"

Lassiter looked at him, came to himself.

"What?"

"Why aren't you going to marry?"

"Good ——, do you think I could marry in such a hole as this?"

The mule driver stared blankly, but presently ejaculated—

"Oh—no—no—certainly not——"

"You wouldn't, would you?"

"If—if somebody else—er—killed the babies?"

"Somebody else——"

"The priests, didn't you say?"

The two men stood staring at each other, both completely at sea. The Colombian finally said—

"Anyway, you are not going to marry Tilita tonight?"

"No, I am going to the temple."

Nunes nodded solemnly.

"We are much alike, Señor Lassiter, that is what I would do." He pondered a moment; then for some reason drew out his pistol again and carefully removed the cartridges from the chamber, one by one. He placed the automatic in one pocket, the cartridges in another, touched his sombrero and moved off toward the baobab. Before he was out of sight, he broke into his airy whistling again and did a little skip-step, like a boy impatient for some sport.

WHILE Lassiter talked to Nunes he had decided to become a priest of the Sun. Something within the man had determined upon cloistration in the *teocalla*. What it was that determined, when it had determined, the promoter did not know. The decision had come to pass in the blind alleys of his subconsciousness.

The first hint the man received was when he spoke tentatively to old Prymoxl. Now he had announced a definite decision to Nunes. He walked back into his cubicle and began packing his bags with a kind of thirst for the quiet and abnegation of the temple.

As he packed, the surroundings of the paddlewood brought Birdsong before his mind. He thought of how he had run after the little man for their last talk, of how Birdsong had warned him against idolatrous women, and had prayed that he should never marry Tilita. His present action and that prayer were a last strange coincidence.

Just around in the southern cubicle lay scattered Birdsong's Bibles where they would lie and mold until time and insects reduced them to dust. This was the outcome of the price of land advancing in Arkansas, and a squatter's gratitude to God for the law of adverse possession—this pitiful sacrifice for a callous muleteer.

Lassiter was stowing away the last of his things when he heard a step outside, and then a little gasp. He straightened with the deliberation of thirty-nine years and saw Tilita standing with his dinner in the sunlight of the entrance. She seemed breathless from hurrying, and now stood looking at him with frightened eyes. She put the platter on the table mechanically, and then stood mute, regarding first the man, then his packed bags.

The promoter remained motionless with the peculiar outspread, hanging hands of a man who is caught under suspicious circumstances. Mentally he blasphemed that he had packed his bags so hastily. He should have let the girl come and go. They advertised his decision. They shouted it without finesse. He had meant to consult with Tilita, to win her over gently, but his packed bags damned him.

She moistened her lips.

"My *madre* told me th-that perhaps——"

Her composure which depended on her silence failed on this sentence. She began another—

"I r-ran all the way. I—I was afraid you would b—be g——"

Suddenly she dropped to her knees with her arms across the platter—

"Oh—oh, *primo!*" she sobbed. "Th-this was our w-wedding supper——"

She lay sobbing violently with her arms stretched among the fruits and wine and bowls that were meant to grace her wedding feast.

Lassiter crossed to her with a melting pity. He wrapped her in his arms.

"Oh, Tilita, beautiful, hush, don't cry, sweetheart——"

He was patting her cheek; he lifted her blue-black hair and pressed his lips to the whiteness of her neck. The smell of her hair, the spice of the wine and the soft rondures of her form filled Lassiter with the vastness of his resignation.

One lobe of his brain set up a desperate pleading for this luscious woman; another began framing some excuse that would protect her from the devastating knowledge that had come to him. The old excuse of religion came to his mind, that mental buffer to interpose before the edge of reality. It was the first and last use Lassiter ever made of the science.

"Tilita, a man's religious duty should come first of all——

"Tilita, both of us owe our lives to Pachacamac who made us——

"Tilita, both of us will live forever as bride and groom in the bright mansions of the Sun——"

With long sighs, the man mouthed the old, old *clichés*. The ashes, the emptiness of it filled his mouth with salt. He circled her breast and face with his arms and pressed his face to hers. He could feel her wet cheeks against his.

"Oh, Tilita, Tilita—" he shuddered.

His pain brought the girl some self control. She began mothering him and lifted herself, and partially lifted him. She stood with wet face, with one arm about his neck, and one hand on his breast. She glanced down at her platter, and lowered an arm to offer him some wine.

Her arm bent a little backward and dimpled at the elbow, with the soft flexibility of a woman's arm. Every move she made wrought upon the priest. He wondered desperately if it would be possible for them to live childlessly in Motobatl, but her very wealth of charm jeered at him. Her babies would be as dimpled and lovely as she. He could not touch the wine. They went together slowly to the hammock and sat.

SHE was so wretched that Lassiter prevailed upon her to lie at full length and he sat at the slenderness of her waist. They remained thus in silence, and presently the strange comfort that lovers give each other crept slowly over them both. It dulled their sadness. It hushed the trickle of minutes in a pool of timelessness.

The man looked sadly at the shadows about her eyes, at the little hollow at the base of her throat. Her hair seemed dark as if she were sick, and her eyes remained steadfastly on his.

Presently she whispered with a faint smile that she had prayed every evening since they first knelt by the web of the sun that he should come to believe in Pachacamac—and now he had.

"I shall become a vestal of the Sun," she told him.

Their mood fell into a sort of adagio. The flattery of the cloister came to Lassiter pensively. He thought of himself as high priest, and of vestals, unused, holding a sort of faint violet sweetness. The possibility of a sort of happiness began to limn itself even on the murderous background of Motobatl. No doubt that mood laid hold of the girl even more strongly, for she was a child with a child's dreaminess.

He sat looking down at her, holding her hands, filled with her sweetness. A ray of the declining sun sifted through the paddlewood and its pool of light wore slowly across the floor. The perfume of the jungle breathed in upon them. A fly droned above the cordage of the hammock, and a last, when it settled on the strange rope of which the bed was made, it zinged away as if again the devil of insects were in pursuit.

The girl's gaze grew dreamy. Her breathing became quite regular. Her eyes drooped. Her anxieties of the preceding days, the torments of a girl's first love, the sleepless and terrible night she had spent in the temple, all rushed upon her as she lay relaxed and at peace with the man she loved.

She looked dewy in her sleep. Her eyes were like pale blue water-lilies above the crimson flowering of her lips. Now and then her fingers clutched Lassiter's at some impulse of her nerves.

The promoter realized that now was the painless time for him to go. He loosed his fingers gently from her hand; he lifted his weight carefully from the hammock and stood clear. It swung the hammock a little, but she slept with the limp soundness of thirteen.

The promoter stood looking down at her. The little cubicle seemed filled with light and perfume emanating from the sleeping girl. A great sadness came over the man. Had Birdsong lived, in this sweet flower garden he would have found rest and peace, the sweet communion of long nights and tenderness by day——

He picked up his packs guardedly and for another moment hung looking at her with his burden. He was doing her a great, great kindness to preserve her beauty from the pain and murder of child-bearing in Motobatl; he was doing her a great, great goodness to preserve her faith and to resign her heavy bosom to the chill purity of the temple. This was the great kindness and the great goodness of Charles Lassiter's life.

On his way out, his eyes rested a moment on his untouched portion of the marriage feast.

XIV

THE chronic suppression of society prevents a man from bewailing his griefs openly and sanitarily. Probably ages of fighting and military training has taught the mind the wisdom of the generalissimo who stands off cool and collected, thinking what best may be done in the emergency, even while his army breaks and perishes.

Charles Lassiter deliberately ceased thinking of the *mestizo* girl almost as soon as he left the paddlewood. He avoided things that would remind him of her. He made a quarter of a mile circuit through the steamy jungle around the baobab where Prymoxl still toiled at the wedding feast. He struck in toward the lake at an angle that would miss the cow-tree forest. His bags were heavy; the afternoon painfully bright and hot. The glare hurt his eyes, and he felt weary and old.

He kept his mind on the surface of things, so thinly on the surface of things that it was a sort of vacancy. When he looked at the palm fronds, at the reach of the lake toward the *teocalla*, these things simply were. With an effort he banished all mental association or aura of beauty. A cow must look at a landscape in some such fashion.

From the lake shore he saw some white

rolling clouds drift up out of the Amazon valley above the eastern rim of Motobatl. Their whiteness turned the sky above them to an indigo and the palisades to a cardinal. His mind did not combine these three brilliancies into a harmony.

The hillock which hid the Web of the Sun lifted its mystery between him and the temple. His eyes rested on it with a stunned man's quietism. Only when he passed it and waded through the hot sand around the swing of the lake did the memory of Tilita assail him. In this blistering place he had kissed and embraced her. An ache struck through his mind, like the start of a broken tooth. The promoter made a harried movement. He swung his bags to his other shoulder and scrambled back to the surface of things.

He looked behind him. The sun was an hour and a half high. A fisherman rowed his boat toward a reedy island. Far up the beach Lassiter could see the black dots of two human figures coming toward him. No doubt it was some of Birdsong's men bringing a sacrifice to atone for their impiety.

So he walked on, considering Birdsong's murder very quietly, without the faintest condemnation or approval. It was war, a move in a chess game. The pawns of life took first this position and that. Birdsong was dead; he was stepping into the archiepiscopal chair; Gogoma would paint—it was a —— hot day.

Quiz-Quiz, the hunchback, stood at Nunes' *bolsa* with its queer top where it lay at the edge of the piazza. Whether the acolyte were waiting for him or not, Lassiter did not know. The crooked little man took one of the bags and the two proceeded across the vast piazza that quivered in the heat.

The columns of the façade seemed to tremble. The hexagonal tufa blocks stung Lassiter's feet. The sun stuck a hot brand to the back of his neck. The piazza seemed endless. The hunchback piloted him toward the southern side entrance.

Half-way across the piazza the Stendill agent peered back through the flame of sunshine. The distant figures had enlarged. They were almost to the net, and were running.

With vast relief, Lassiter stepped out of the heat into the chill hypogeum. Its gloom and chill fell like a lotion on his eyes. As he moved inside he thought he heard a distant shouting, or, more likely, it was some variation in the coughing and sucking of the whirlpool far to the north.

The southern entrance let into a mere tunnel that penetrated inward twenty or thirty steps, then led into another tunnel that ran north and south at right angles. This passageway gave on an endless row of cenobitic cells parallel with the cliff outside.*

The hunchback led the way to one of these cells, put Lassiter's bag inside, glanced about for a moment to see that everything was in order, then explained that this would be the novitiate's room and retired.

The promoter stood looking about him. A hole through ten feet of stone admitted a ray of light into the chamber. The only furnishing was a sort of stone couch or table. The walls of the cell were roughly hewn, but the surface of the couch was not only polished, but into it was worn the impression of a human form. How many anchorites for how many centuries had stretched themselves on it to hard repose!

LASSITER put his bags in a corner and stood looking around the expressionless hole. The floor, also, was worn into distinct grooves by the tramping of feet. The thought of such a stream of life eddying out of the warmth and sunlight of the crater to stagnate in this chill hole oppressed Lassiter. To what dull end they had gravitated.

The promoter sat down on his couch and looked at his bags. He did not open them, nor make any of those little arrangements of housekeeping which a man performs even to camp for a night. It seemed not worth while. Indeed, the mental basis of every home-keeping gesture in man are a mate and children. By his desertion of Tilita, this had been torn from Lassiter's brain.

So he sat on the couch in silence. The air shaft gave a yellowish circle of light on the opposite wall. It showed the grain of the volcanic stone. Presently the promoter became aware of a faint odor of the cow-tree milk in the close air. Lassiter straightened and savored the air almost in surprize. It was the odor of milk. Then he realized that the scent of Tilita's body had clung to his clothes.

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*The temple of the Sun in Motobatl was probably the most populous cenobite known to history. Twenty-two hundred and sixty-five cells honeycomb the cliff. The whole object of this vast institution was to reduce the birth rate of the imprisoned nation by celibacy.

It annoyed Lassiter sharply. A vision of the girl asleep in the hammock passed before his eyes. He shook his shoulders sharply, got up, walked over to the air shaft and looked out. The shaft gave on a circle of saffron western sky. The promoter stood breathing at the intake, thinking he should have changed his clothing.

His hardly suppressed thoughts began breaking in on his brain. He could see her asleep in the hammock. On his fingers he could feel the warmth where her hands had clung. It seemed that he had, at that moment, stepped away from her side.

He let his curbed imagination go. He wondered wistfully if she were still asleep; and what would she do when she awoke? Go back to the baobab? Back to old Prymoxl and the empty wedding feast? What a raw, lonely vigil the night would bring her! And had Birdsong lived, what rapture they would have known! This very sunset that sent a splotch of crimson light down the air-shaft would have drawn curtains about their wedding couch!

A pulse began throbbing in his neck. He could feel a faint warm line along the closure of his lips. Blood murmured in his ear. In the vast stillness of the cliff, he could hear the functioning of his heart. Its systole and diastole formed a gurgling that sounded almost like an external voice. He imagined it said his own name over and over—

"Señor Lassiter! Señor Lassiter! Señor Lassiter!"

It might have been Tilita's voice repeating the watery syllables interminably.

As the man sat listening, the faint calling seemed to detach itself from the murmur in his ears. It seemed to come from the corridor. It was distinctly from the corridor, far down toward the south, in the opposite direction from the entrance.

That any person should be whispering his name in this distant wing of the hypogeum amazed Lassiter. He went out into the passageway. He could not see beyond fifteen or twenty doors owing to the curve of the passage. But the whispering of his name came closer and closer.

It sounded as if some spectral voice were moving through solid stone from cell to cell calling him. It was impossible to say whether it was man's or woman's. Now it was only a few doors above him. The corridor remained empty. The voice passed into an adjoining cell. Suddenly it was in his own cell.

The promoter wheeled back inside.

"What is it?" he asked of emptiness. Then he saw that his air-shaft was darkened.

He stepped to his shaft, looked through and saw the Colombian's face at the other end. The man's eyes were staring.

"By the Holy Virgin!" gasped the fellow. "I thought I'd never find you—the girl, Tilita—you're a priest—perhaps you can—"

Balthasar's excitement communicated itself to the neophyte:

"What is it?" he asked sharply. "What's happened to her? Answer me, man!"

A sudden premonition roughened his skin.

The Colombian suddenly lifted his voice to a whispered wail:

"Oh, Mother of God! She's in the net! Jumped in! Run! *Mio Dios, señor*, run!"

Lassiter whirled. As he rushed out of his cell, he still heard that wailing whisper pursuing him:

"Run! Run! Oh, Holy Mary!"

Quiz-Quiz was at the door. Two or three priests were flying northward down the corridor that led toward the main temple. Lassiter shouted at the hunchback to open the door. The crooked little man began pointing and screaming for Lassiter to run with the other priests—to grease his feet. The promoter stormed the door through which he had entered. He flung his weight against the bolts. They clashed back. The portal inched open. Quiz-Quiz clamored a warning as Lassiter shot through the opening.

Furnace heat and a blare of golden light smote the troglodyte as he leaped out of the cavern. Nunes was waiting in a quiver at the entrance. At sight of Lassiter he whirled and bolted across the wide pavement. He began explaining in staccato:

"Mother of God! Quiz-Quiz wouldn't let me in! I had to shout in a thousand windows! She must be swallowed up—gone——"

He tore along through the heat. The promoter panted after him. A hot breeze beat against the American's face; his heart pounded. The piazza was so huge his feet seemed to patter up and down in one place. Nunes gradually crept up on him.

By the time they reached the *bolsa* at the edge of the piazza, the muleteer was abreast. He drew out his automatic and stuck it butt foremost to the flying New Yorker. Lassiter got it without breaking his stride.

Beyond the pavement, the sand slowed him up. His feet slipped, his shoes filled. Both men were reduced to a miserable trot. Lassiter stared ahead through his dripping sweat. The sun was just sinking behind the western palisade. It was the hour of sacrifice, when things flung into the net vanished. With a last effort the promoter plowed up the mound, gasping for breath.

IN THE limed circle lay the Incan girl. At the sound of Lassiter's sobbing breath she turned her head, saw him and screamed—

"*Primo!*"

She struggled violently to loose herself. The man plunged down the stones toward her.

At that moment a section of the landward stones opened. Something huge, leggy and bristly flashed out. Its spindling legs covered a twenty foot circle. Its body was a globular bag mottled with spots the size of a man's head. In a sort of spiked plate on its front were set six staring black eyes. The plate and bag were borne on the huge spiky legs at about the height of a man's head.

The thing flashed on the girl with a sort of rubbery snap. It caught her on the movable spikes of its frontal plate, and next moment flashed back. It was so swift, so silent, so horrible, Lassiter had neither time nor mind to raise his firearm. A mere stab, a flash—and the net hung empty save for the girl's clothes still sticking to the limed cords.

The Stendill agent climbed down to the net shakily, like an old man. He set his feet on the cords and moved carefully around the limed center toward the unstable stones. He heard Nunes shouting at him from the hillock.

What he pushed was not a stone but a sort of silken flap that swung back easily. Inside it was dark. He could see only the white blur of the girl, and the glint of eyes, such as he had seen on the rim of the crater. He drew out his flashlight with queer deliberation and switched it on.

Under its spurt, the cavern glowed all over with a pale sheen. It was lined with silk. The place stunk of insects and rotting flesh.

Under the hard light of the electric torch, the creature gave the girl's body a delicate kiss, a mere touch with a hair-like lancet that slipped into the lower margin of her right breast over her heart. At the touch, the girl curved up her body, her right arm dropped among the spikes on the frontal plate, her left swung limply down.

Lassiter risked a shot at the eyes above her body. During the very flash of the shot, the monster vanished and reappeared sticking to the silken roof over the promoter's head. Its great bag hung downward from a spread of legs. The white body of the girl was still in its mandibles. The promoter lifted his automatic to shoot again.

Suddenly down through the electric glare fell coils of shining viscid cables. They fell in a sort of horrible shimmering beauty around his neck, arms, legs. He could see the stuff spewing out of eight spinnarets at the end of the abdomen. Fortunately the man had his pistol trained on it. He fired deliberately, three times, into this downpour of limed silk. At the third shot Tilita's body fell from the roof to the silken floor. The thing itself vanished. Amid the gummy silk Lassiter contrived to twist his light this way and that. The cavern was empty. The thing had escaped with such suddenness his eyes did not register the motion.

The sound of voices and the flare of torches came from the further end of the cavern and presently Gogoma and four other priests of the sun appeared crawling out of the end of a tunnel which evidently connected with the temple.

The naked behemoth glanced about, then waddled over the silken carpet to the woman's limp form. In the flare of the torches he balanced his bulk carefully, stooped and lifted the flexuous figure. He straightened and laid it across the sweating expanse of his chest and shoulder. He stroked her curves with puffy fingers in profound satisfaction. After a moment he thought to ask—

"I hope you are not injured, Señor Lassiter?"

The Stendill agent made some answer amid his smother of limed tubes. Two of the priests ran over and began stripping the viscous stuff from his body with their greased hands.

"In your zeal to save the girl from being consumed, Señor Lassiter," purred the high priest, "I hope you have not caused her to be imperfectly anesthetized and preserved."

The promoter made no answer. The words Gogoma used seemed to mean nothing.

"This body," proceeded the high priest, "will be a rare addition to my gallery." Again he stroked her rondures with swollen fingers. "After all, Señor Lassiter, we have preserved the immortal part of this girl—her beauty—this sweet modeling of flesh. That is what all men love in a woman, Señor Lassiter, beauty. The lover clasps beauty in his arms and it vanishes even while it lies upon his heart. But the artist, Señor Lassiter—ah, the artist really enjoys his love.

"With his eye, that subtle sense of touch, infinitely refined, he embraces the whole woman in a sort of kissing gaze. How gross the passion of a lover, Señor Lassiter, how cool and sublimated the rapture of an artist. Beauty is the thought of God. In the temple we will return thanks reverently for this little sleepy flower——"

The priests were picking their way back through the tunnel to the temple of the sun. They came out in a great chamber into which the last of the sunset fell through a huge rose window. Opposite the window was a rayed plate of burnished gold. The yellow light falling on this mirror filled the chamber with an intense fulgor.

The apartment was lined on all sides with a brilliant tapestry of featherwork. The vivid green of parrots vibrated against the lory's yellow, the crimson of a humming-bird's throat flared against the cream of a pelican. Such an irisated palet no paint ever produced.

THE picture was of the rising sun spreading its web of light. In its shining gossamer were woven animals, trees, insects, naked men and women, babies, spiders, loathly worms. On the right wall the shining beams raveled out into a myriad human shapes, belly-gods gorging, warriors slaughtering, lovers embracing, law-makers judging, thieves stealing, murderers stabbing, and yet it was all sunlight. The whole vital realm, the artist was saying, is nothing but a rainbow froth of love, lust, rapine, pain, weariness, joy and ecstasy where sunlight impinges on matter. All of it is somehow bound up in sunlight, all of it somehow, is spun out of the web of the Sun.

In the center of the room knelt the naked forms of Tilita's grandmother and of the colporteur. The Spanish woman's sensuousness and the Arkansan's powerful physique and hard face formed a subtle harmony with the figures in the featherwork. Birdsong's scroll of polished black hair was still intact. On the other side of the revivalist, old Gogoma arranged Tilita's body in an attitude of adoration.

Lassiter stood looking at the three figures kneeling to the golden image of the sun. Their bodies were preserved, their hearts barely beat in the immortality of a spider's poison. They would never die; they would never live. Their bodies would persist on and on, exactly as if they were netted in the spider's web, waiting for a return of the monster to suck out their juices.

Lassiter wondered dully if any consciousness lay behind their slow-batting eyes. If they felt pain or discomfort or nothing.

The light died with the suddenness which the promoter had noted from the rim of the cliff. Then all the new ecclesiast could see were three dim figures kneeling in the gloom. As Lassiter marched out with the other priests, a curious fear assailed him. He was afraid that a rat might gnaw Tilita in the night.[*]

XV

AT SOME time during the night the solution of his whole career in Motobatl became clear to Charles Lassiter. The promoter paused in his pacing to and fro in front of the air-shaft in gray relief. It was very simple.

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[*] The discovery of the immense trap-door spiders (*cteniza gigantea hindshawensis*) in the Amazon valley by Sir Cecil Hindshaw in 1918 makes comment on the above passage in Charles Lassiter's narrative unnecessary. However, the transcriber takes the liberty to refresh the reader's recollection of Sir Cecil's noteworthy contribution to entomological literature. On page ninety-two of his book[†] the author says:

"These large spiders imitate almost perfectly with their trap doors, the stony environs of their dens, reproducing even the coloration of the stone and its stratification. Among the Jivaros we found a fully developed 'spider worship,' resembling the 'mantis worship' among the African Bushmen, or a similar spider worship called 'ananzi' by the negroes of the West Coast of Africa.

"These enormous spiders are, no doubt, the most formidable creatures in existence today. They go on long forays and can kill and drag a bullock to its den. My guide declared he saw one capture a jaguar in its toils. These large spiders seem to equal, proportionally, the ordinary spider in speed and agility. The common *cteniza* can move twenty times its own length in a second. The *cteniza gigantea* which I succeded in killing had a spread of fifteen feet. This would give it a speed of three hundred feet per second. Certainly I made no measurements, but on the two occasions when I saw this *cteniza* before I obtained the killing shot, the creature simply disappeared from our vision. We had not the slightest idea of the direction of its flight until the trailers found its track.

[†] "A Naturalist on the Upper Amazon," Hindshaw. Wier & Duffling, 16, Piccadilly Circus, London. 20s. 6d.

The shaft itself was now a small circular blur in the utter blackness of his cell. As Lassiter paused at the end of the intake, the wet smell of rain breathed in upon him.

For a moment the agent stood reckoning the position of his bags, but as he started to move toward them, he remembered that he would not need them again. The thought brought a passing sense of queerness. Always he had carried his bags; now he was deserting them. It seemed strange to think that he was about to walk away and never come back for the leather cases stacked in the corner of his crypt.

He moved carefully toward the door, holding out his arms, fingers spread. When finally he touched the wall, he did not find the door where he thought it should be. But at last he found it, passed through and began feeling his way down the long curving passage of the hypogeum.

The turn of the corridor was at a greater distance than he had expected, but after that he got quickly to the door. His management of the bolts a few hours before aided him in the blackness and a few moments later he drew the great shutters a little apart. A current of spray drifted in out of the night, and the rain whispered in the black ear of the *teocalla*. *Inviernillo*, little Winter, had descended on Motobatl at last.

Lassiter shivered at the thought of exposing himself to the rain at night. He felt an impulse to return to his cell for his poncho and sombrero, and then he reflected that he would remove both before he entered the water, and that they would lie on the edge of the piazza all night in the rain. Oddly enough, the thought of leaving a soaked coat and a shapeless hat was distasteful to the agent.

He closed the portals softly behind him, paused for a moment in the recessed arch of the entrance, and then stepped out into the slow cold rain.

The drizzle chilled Lassiter, but it brought him a certain composure and sequence of thought that he had not known in his cell. The wide murmur of the rain filled the night, and through it he could hear the suck and gasp of the whirlpool in the north. That lullaby should soothe away his too constant thoughts. Beyond the piazza toward the west, he could see the sheen of the lake and the pale narrowing of the river as it swung in toward the *teocalla*. He could even make out the shimmer of the sand where he and Tilita had—the thought broke into the old trickle of pain.

The strangeness of what he was about to do gradually grew on Lassiter. It seemed amazing that presently he, by his own will, would flicker out like a picture on a screen. It seemed fantastic that his own legs, his own eyes would guide themselves to nothingness. They had served him so long—and now they would turn traitor to themselves——

The lift and fall of his feet over the wet pavement; the play of his muscles under his soggy clothes; the trickle of water through his hair; the very functioning of his eyes in the gray night took on a sort of marvel. How strange that all this elaboration that moved and breathed and grieved could, in a moment, by its own will, become a stringing of mud and a blowing of dust!

His death would be the strangest, the most enigmatic gesture of his life. Then a queer thought came——

Would blotting out despair ease it? In the shimmer of the lake he would find neither peace nor pain—he would find nothing. Could becoming nothing rectify his wrong to Tilita? His remorse was a kind of unbalanced force, and forces cannot be blotted; they can only be counteracted. Was it possible for his sin toward Tilita somehow to escape his body? It was a sick man's notion, absurd, feverish. A shiver went over him.

I need hardly say the slaughter of one *ctenisa gigantea* furnished more thrills than a dozen tiger hunts in India; nevertheless, I do not predict that it will become a popular sport."

When Motobatl was occupied by workmen in the employ of the Stendill lines in the construction of the hangar and tourist hotel now in the crater, the three unfortunate victims of the spider were found in the great *teocalla*. Much discussion arose what disposition should be made of the bodies. At last two were sent to scientific institutions for medical examination. London College of Physicians and Surgeons received a man, and Johns Hopkins of Baltimore received a woman. Under a microscopic examination, it was discovered by Dr. J. Edward Westmoreland of London, that the spider in paralyzing human victims inserts its poison lancet over the heart, into the back of the neck and through the umbilicus into the viscera. The poison produces profound coma and seems also to act as a preservative against cellular degeneration.

The third victim, a girl, which is thought to be the Tilita mentioned in Lassiter's narrative, fell into the hands of a Professor Waldrup, a tourist flying through Motobatl. When last heard from, oddly enough in Arkansas, Professor Waldrup was giving hypnotic performances with the body, allowing it to lie all night in the show-windows of village drug stores, sticking it full of hat pins and such like, catering to the scientific mind of America. It should be a matter of national pride how we Americans derive culture and refinement out of the most untoward circumstances.

THE dark blur of Nunes' *bolsa* still lay at the foot of the piazza; as Lassiter approached it, he heard a scraping and presently saw a movement in the mass of the boat. As he came closer, he saw it was a man bailing out the boat with an oar. The promoter walked on past the stranded *bolsa* into the water when Nunes' voice called, "Is it you, *señor?*"

The promoter answered and paused at the depth of his knees.

"*Mio Dios!*" gasped the Colombian. "And you escaped the spider! You escaped —I heard shots——"

The promoter agreed wearily.

"You see I'm out." And he waded on into the river.

There was a pause; the muleteer came to the edge of the water and peered after the vanishing man. He cleared his throat, then called with a certain politeness through the rain.

"If you will wait a moment, *señor,* I am going your way. We have been *camarados* all the way through, *señor*—" The promoter peered at him through the gloom.

"Do you mean——"

"*Si, señor,* and the whirlpool will be more dashing than still water, more fitting for *caballeros*——"

"It's all the same, Nunes."

"But—but, *señor,*" pleaded the muleteer in a queer voice, "I hate going down alone—I hate it— I was standing here thinking— I will tell you——

"I meant to take the girl down with me in this *bolsa.* Ah, Señor Lassiter, that would have been a death! To be sucked down the whirlpool in her arms. *Madre de Dios!* What a death for a *caballero!* Kissing her scarlet lips, pressing her soft body! What a death!"

He broke off shuddering in the drizzle. Lassiter watched his frustration with detached eyes. Suddenly the Colombian broke out in a sort of rage.

"Mother of God! You *Norte Americanos* feel nothing! You are stones! I loved the girl! She hated me just enough to be fire—flame! May the fiends——"

He shook his oar at the dripping skies, flung it into the *bolsa,* seized the prow and heaved at the clumsy vessel. It grated a few inches on the sand.

The muleteer heaved again, damning himself, the world, the girl; as he damned, he worked the *bolsa* into the river. When it floated he left off his cursing with his pushing and swung up on its gunwale. As he floated past Lassiter he reached down a hand.

"Come on, *camarado,*" he said in the dull backwash of his violence. "Let us perish like *caballeros* in the maelstrom; not drown like pigs in a pool—" As he heaved the promoter aboard, he panted between heaves—

"It is true—I meant to murder you—on your bridal couch, Don Carlos—and seize your bride—but not as an *enemigo*—not so, *mi amigo*—but as one dear friend—who murders—for the woman they love——"

Lassiter got himself into the stern of the *bolsa.* The smallness, the triviality of the Colombian's lust, this final melodramatic gesture, this assertion of his entity—how pigmy-ish it stood against the impersonal drizzle of the skies, the rising wail of the maelstrom and the vast blankness of death.

The Colombian pulled down the cover of his *bolsa* which he had designed to protect him and Tilita for a little space. It shut out the rain and the gray night. Then Lassiter heard him crawling along the sides adjusting some sort of fastenings.

The promoter shifted his seat on the reed bottom until he had gained some sort of repose. The little nerves of his body demanded their due attention on the eve of extinction. They were like tiny burghers functioning, unconscious and unalarmed while a tornado rushed upon their dwelling.

Presently the Colombian said quietly:

"I watched you when you left her in the paddlewood, Don Carlos. I went in at once and waked her and yet—I let her be—there was something so terrible in her eyes —I could not do it. You can well imagine my amazement, Don Carlos, when I found that I, Dom Pedro Porforio Balthasar Nunes, a muleteer and a *caballero,* was really so weak as to hold off my hands, to let her go— Do you think, *señor,* that He—He Who looks down upon us and reads the good and evil of our hearts—do you think that in a moment He will say to me, 'My son, Porforio, for this great renunciation you shall have the highest seat in——' "

The *bolsa* touched a stone and jarred heavily. The coughing and sucking of the whirlpool overcame the muleteer's voice. The increasing clamor of the waters brought back with a last despair Lassiter's days with Tilita at the bird limes. Against the intense darkness, the girl arose before him with the intensity of tropical sunlight, her sweetness, her eagerness, her rich earnest of love and children—the odor of milk suddenly filled the *bolsa*——

The roaring of the water drowned every thought but the image. The *bolsa* swung up on the piled water and swung round and round with narrowing and increasing spin. Came a vast sucking in Lassiter's ears. The front of the *bolsa* tipped up crazily. Lassiter, in the stern, felt himself being drawn down backward. Water came squirting down on him through a hundred interstices of the top. It covered the spinning figure of the man with a swishing sound.

The promoter suddenly began struggling for air. He strove to pull himself up. His chest made spasmodic efforts to inhale the water roaring about his head. The form of Tilita flamed brighter, then flickered—a deep gratitude filled the brain of the drowning man. He knew beyond the maelstrom lay nothing.

Addenda by the Transcriber

AN ENGINEERING party which made a recent survey of the outlet of Motobatl lake in behalf of a hydro-electric company, discovered that the shell of the crater at the whirlpool is only one hundred and twelve yards in thickness, and that the racing water accomplishes its passage through the hole in exactly fifty-two and three-eighths seconds.

Two tourists have emulated Lassiter's passage through the whirlpool by having themselves nailed up in barrels and launched into the maelstrom. No harm came to them, although a swimmer who attempted to dive through the outlet was killed.

Of Lassiter's passage, nothing could be learned from the man himself, as he has no recollection of it. The Stendill agent's memory picks up its narrative at a hospital in Iquitos, Peru. At this place Lassiter found himself suffering from a cerebral trouble. Nunes had disappeared, although the house physician stated that a Colombian, giving the name of Balthasar Nunes, brought the sick man to the hospital.

This Colombian told the doctor that he had brought his comrade down the Rio Nanay, which had its fountain-head in the mountain of Motobatl. For several days the Colombian had been very attentive, calling each day at the hospital, and even asking to help nurse his American friend, which, of course, was not permitted. However, before Lassiter became normal, Nunes' visits to the hospital stopped and nothing further was ever heard from the muleteer.

At Iquitos Lassiter made a bundle of Birdsong's letters and the Testament and forwarded them to Mollie Birdsong, Birdsong, Arkansas. He told her simply that her husband had perished in the service of his religion and that he had intrusted these letters to him, Lassiter, for her.

Iquitos, Peru, is the headwater of ocean navigation on the Amazon. Two weeks after Lassiter's convalescence, a Stendill steamer made port and the promoter set sail for New York.

On the first day down the river, the invalid picked up a copy of the *Diario*, a local paper of Iquitos. Across the front page were spread the headlines of an execution. Lassiter read it under the awning on the afterdeck. The article wound about in magniloquent Spanish fashion. At the conclusion, Lassiter read:

> The accusation against Señor Nunes was that he followed Señora Altagracia from the *paseo* where he first saw her to her magnificent *casa* on Calle de la Virgin Immaculata, entered her boudoir in the sable watches of the night, and there attempted to misuse his prodigious strength and activity. When the *policia* burst into the mansion at the call of her husband, Señor Dom Tomas Altagracia, Caballero Nunes admitted his intent and was arrested.
>
> Señor Dom Tomas Altagracia is a retired coffee exporter, and his wife, the beautiful Dona Purita Altagracia, has only nineteen years. They have always appeared to live together very happily.
>
> The trial of Señor Nunes has aroused great interest and sympathy in Iquitos, especially among the *señoritas*. An admiring and distinguished anthology of beautiful damsels and charming wives attended the execution, which was admitted to be the most magnificent held in Iquitos for years.
>
> When an opportunity was given the condemned to address his hearers, Señor Nunes pronounced a graceful tribute to "woman." Not a dry eye remained in his concourse of beautiful and distinguished hearers. Flowers were thrown upon the *banquillo;* dozens of *señoritas* climbed up to embrace the prisoner. It was an ovation.
>
> Señora Dona Purita Altagracia pinned upon his lapel a blood-red rose, and printed upon his lips a kiss and upon his heart a long embrace—as a signal of her forgiveness.
>
> The *señora's* husband, Dom Tomas, was too old to attend the execution in person.
>
> Dom Balthasar Nunes met the fire of his unwilling executioners with an open breast, a smile upon his face and a graceful salute to the *señoras*. Four balls pierced his noble heart.

YANKEE TRICKS

by Farnham Bishop

Author of "Yankee Notions," "The Deacon's Seventy-Four," etc.

"Then fill your glasses full,
And we'll drink to Captain Hull,
And merrily we'll push along the brandy, oh!
Johnny Bull may toast his fill,
But let him say what he will,
The Yankee boys for fighting are the dandy, oh!"

AT THE close of the final roaring stanza of "Constitution and Guerriere," the most popular of all the popular songs of that lively year of 1812, the chairman stood up and rapped for order with his sword-hilt.

"Citizens of Falport, we are gathered here this afternoon to welcome our valiant and successful friends and neighbors, the officers and crew of the *Snapping Turtle,* privateer——"

"Hooray!" interrupted the assembled citizenry of Falport, Mass., with a cheer that rattled the tavern windows.

The banquet was just getting under full headway and the hard cider beginning to seep through the thick crust that covers emotions on Cape Cod.

Colonel Seth Dusenbury, chairman of the reception committee and commander of the Falport County militia, many of whom were present in full uniform, pounded a few more dents in the table-top and resumed his fervid oration.

"Those intrepid seamen who, after giving up their own puny and disabled vessel as a cartel to their more numerous but vanquished foes, have returned in triumph on board their gigantic prize, the East Indiaman, *Nabob,* the largest and most richly laden ship ever brought into this or any other American port. Charge your glasses, gentlemen, and drink with me to the health of the *Nabob's* captor, that true-born son of Falport, Captain Asa Swift."

When the applause had come to an end, the captain tried to reply. He stood there, flushed and tongue-tied, suffering the exquisite agony of a modest man of action exhibited as a hero and forced to make his first public speech. For five eternal seconds he faced a battery of staring eyes and sought vainly for something to say. Then came a startling interruption.

The door of the dining-room flew open and slammed back against the wall with a bang that made the banqueters jump and turn toward the doorway. They saw on the threshold a lean, stoop-shouldered man in a tight, rusty black suit and a neck-cloth of yellow linen that matched his face for color and wrinkles.

"Belshazzar's feast!" he cried scornfully through his nose. "Belshazzar's feast!"

At the note of hostility in the other's voice, all of Asa Swift's embarrassment and diffidence vanished. At the same time his heart warmed toward his ancient enemy for getting him out of an awkward situation.

"Come right in, Deacon Terwilliger," said the captain hospitably. "Draw up a chair and fill your plate."

The deacon had been the only man in Falport to reject an invitation to the banquet, nor did he accept one now.

"You'd better hustle out of here quick ez God'll let ye!" he shrilled warningly.

"Thar's a king's ship in sight and making for Falport harbor!"

A bombshell with a sputtering fuse could not have cleared the room more rapidly. Soldiers, seamen and civilians jumped up from the table and out through the nearest door or window to Main Street, where all stood staring to seaward. It was a bright, clear day in early September, and the nature of the vessel tacking toward them up Vineyard Sound was plain to their practised eyes.

"Man-o'-war brig," said Swift's partner, Noah Bloggs. "English all over."

"*Boxer* class," affirmed Asa Swift, who had seen forced service in the British Navy. "Carries eighteen 18-pounder carronades, sails like a haystack and fights like a bulldog. We could sail rings around her in open sea, but tide's too low for us to cross the bar before she'll be right off the harbor mouth. Noah, we're blockaded."

"We're worse'n that. What's to keep the Britishers from coming right in and taking the *Nabob* back again?"

"Fort Gosnold," replied Swift, indicating the new earthwork of raw red clay on Falport Point, at the entrance to the harbor.

"That mud heap!" exclaimed Bloggs contemptuously. "The guns for the fort are still somewhere on the road betwixt here and Boston and you know it!"

"But does the Britisher know it?" asked Swift shrewdly. "I suppose you're going to march your men out to the fort now, Colonel?"

The militia officer nodded.

"If the English see that it's garrisoned, they may hold off long enough for the guns to get here. It won't do any harm to try."

"I'll send you some fixings to help try with," said the captain. "Starbuck, my lad, run and tell your uncle to bring his sloop alongside. To the boats, all hands!"

THE privateersmen ran down the sandy street to the water-front, embarked, shoved off and pulled out to where the huge *Nabob* rode at anchor. The tall East Indiaman seemed not only too large for the tiny haven but altogether too well armed to worry about the eighteen-gun brig in the offing. Black muzzles yawned from her open ports, to the classic number of seventy-four.

"Bend a whip to the mainyard, Mr. Gifford, hoist out one of the spar-deck guns and be ready to lower it on to Starbuck's deck when his sloop comes alongside," said Swift to his first officer.

The gun, a long forty-two pounder, was lifted from its carriage and swung out overside, as the sloop drew near. Suddenly a badly-secured lashing slipped. The great gun dropped down into the water—and floated!

"Stick a boat-hook into it, Uncle Zeb," called Swift to the grinning elder Starbuck. "I'm sending half-a-dozen of these Quakers out to the fort."

"Hope they'll scare the Britishers ez bad ez they scared the deacon," drawled Uncle Zeb Starbuck, and a laugh went up from ship and sloop.

The *Nabob* was an early, though by no means the earliest, example of a camouflaged ship. Her ingenious and economical English owners had made her in every outward detail an exact copy of a British battleship of the line. So formidable was the likeness that all the way from Bombay to Cape Finisterre, French frigates and Yankee privateers had taken one look and then clapped on all sail to escape.

Among the latter was the Falport schooner *Active*, owned and skippered by Deacon Terwilliger, known to all Cape Cod as the man who was "mean enough to skin a louse for the hide and taller."

The deacon, anxious to cover his retreat and chancing to fall in with his fellow-townsmen Swift and Bloggs in their little home-made privateer *Snapping Turtle*, had generously told them of the "big homeward-bound Britisher" which he implied could be captured at the expense of a little fighting. Intending to deceive, he spoke the literal truth. The *Snapping Turtle* emerging from a dense rain-squall, suddenly found herself so close under the *Nabob's* guns that those imposing weapons were seen to be only dummies of painted wood.

Bringing the two ships board and board with a shock that carried away their own foremast, the Yankee privateersmen had swarmed over the *Nabob's* rail and taken her with scarcely a shot or a blow. The English crew were given the crippled *Snapping Turtle* to work their passage home in, while the Americans stood for Falport in their splendid prize.

On the way they fell in with the deacon, who betrayed his real opinion of the *Nabob* by throwing overboard all his guns and stores in his desperate efforts to escape the supposed seventy-four, which chased him into Falport and made him the laughing-stock of the town.

"Guess it's about time we let up on the deacon," said Swift to his partner. "It was downright Christian of him to warn us the way he did, just now."

Bloggs snorted skeptically.

"He's a Christian for revenue only! I'd trust him as far ez I c'd throw a meetin'-house by the steeple. The deacon's fixing up some low-down scheme to get back at us, mark my words."

Swift shook his head and turned to call down to Uncle Ezra, as the sixth wooden gun was taken aboard the sloop.

"Guess you'd better cast off and make for the point before the Britisher gets near enough to see what sort of artillery you're landing."

Broad-beamed and slow was Starbuck's sloop, but with the ebb running strong and an off-shore wind astern, she crossed the harbor and docked in the little cove behind the fort, while the English brig was still working her way round Tautog Shoal.

Through his telescope, Asa Swift watched a detail of militiamen, hidden from seaward by a ridge of sand, wade out into the cove, hoist the dummy forty-two pounders shoulder-high and hurry with them into Fort Gosnold.

Five minutes later the chunky little man-of-war, beating up for the harbor mouth, hove to with amusing suddenness.

"Guess her officers are using their spy-glasses too," chuckled Swift. "They don't like the looks of the heavy metal that's just been run out of the embrasures. With the flag a-flying and shakoes lining the ramparts, that mud-heap looks mighty dangerous."

"Hope the brig doesn't run in and give the fort a broadside, just to try," said Bloggs.

"I've known a good many British naval officers, Noah, but I've never met one that was crazy enough for that. Long before he could get near enough to use those stubby little carronades of his, those forty-two pounders would knock the brig into matchsticks—if they weren't sticks themselves. And as long as the Britisher keeps out of range, how's he going to learn the difference? He'll hang around for a while, and maybe send in his boats tonight to try and cut us out. If he does, we'll be ready for them."

Boarding-nets were rigged, the few real guns that had been transferred from the *Snapping Turtle* were double-loaded with grape, pistols and cutlasses served out, and a big kettle of pitch set bubbling over the galley fire. All night long the privateersmen slept on their arms or watched for the loom of an on-coming boat and listened for the faint thumping of muffled oars. The night passed without an attack, but morning showed the brig still cruising leisurely back and forth off the harbor mouth.

"He's not here to bombard but to blockade," decided Swift. "Too many privateers been slipping out of Falport to suit the English. Looks as if we'd better land our million-dollar cargo, Noah."

"Gol ram it, we'll glut the market," complained Noah. "Can't expect to sell two thousand tons of silk and spices and calico prints in a place the size of Falport. We'll have to haul it up to Boston by road and that'll cut into our profits somethin' awful."

"You know more about the business end of it than I do. Suppose you go ashore now and see about hiring teams. And since the deacon gave us warning yesterday, Noah, we ought to give him a fair share of the hauling."

"Don't you worry 'bout the deacon's not gettin' his fair share and somethin' over," snorted Bloggs. "Part o' Cape Cod was named for his ancestors."

"What part's that?"

"Buzzard's Bay!"

* * *

"I TOLD you so!" spluttered Noah Bloggs as he came aboard half an hour later. "Don't say I didn't tell you so!"

"Cap'n, there ain't a cart nor a wagon nor a draft-horse nor a mule nor a yoke of oxen to be had in all Falport County."

"What's happened to 'em all?" demanded Swift.

"The deacon's hired the lot! Soon as the old curmudgeon sighted that Britisher, he saw his chance to get even. He's bought or hired every rig and critter in town. While we've been getting ready to fight, he's been sending out agents on horseback to get options on all the farm-wagons from here to Barnstable. He's sittin' in his office now, grinnin' like an old cat with cream on his whiskers, gol ram his hide! He told me to tell you that the sooner you go ashore and talk business the better you'll like his terms."

Captain Asa Swift said nothing as he went over the *Nabob's* side. But the boat's crew observed with joy that "the Old Man had shipped his fighting face."

Yet the privateersman felt helplessly out of his element as he strode into Terwilliger's dusty little office. Had Swift been in either Federal or State service, he could have commandeered transportation and left the deacon to fight it out with the government. But as the mere holder of a letter-of-marque, he would have to drive his own bargains.

"How much do you want for hauling our stuff to Boston, deacon?" he asked bluntly.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars a ton."

"Two hundred and fifty—two thousand tons. Great Cæsar, deacon, that's five hundred thousand dollars!"

"Cargo's worth a million at your own valuation, ain't it? That leaves another half-million for you and Bloggs."

"And the rest of the officers and crew. Can't you set us a lower figure?"

"No, but I can set a higher one," snarled Terwilliger. "Think I've forgotten how you'n Bloggs diddled me out of that cargo of Irish linens, or how you made me throw overboard all my own guns and fixings? Thought you were playing a smart trick on the old deacon, didn't ye? I've got you caught in a cleft stick now, young feller, and you'll be a durn sight leaner and less pert by the time I turn you loose."

"Maybe so, maybe not. Deacon, do you know Vigo Bay?"

"Port of call, nor'west coast of Spain," replied Terwilliger promptly. "Put in there for provisions and water in September 1809, and was overcharged something scandalous."

"Maybe that's where you caught the habit," said Swift dryly. "Did you ever hear tell of what happened at Vigo just a hundred years to the month before you went there?"

"I don't cumber my mind with the vain and gory details of profane history," replied the sanctimonious deacon. "The holy Scriptures are good enough reading for me."

"The gory details of Vigo's history have a lesson for you and me," said the privateersman. "There was a Spanish treasure-fleet arrived there from the West Indies, just like the *Nabob* came to Falport. The Spaniards called out a lot of militia and fixed up a fort or two to guard the harbor and shipping, same as our folks have done here. And then there was a delay about unloading the treasure and hauling it up-country, because of a fuss over the price of cartage and so on, same as you and I are having in this office right now.

"Pretty soon the English learned what was going on. Next thing the Vigo folks knew, the redcoats had landed and were chasing the militia out of the forts, while the King's ships were smashing their way into the harbor to burn, sink and destroy. After the smoke had lifted, the Britishers had all that was left of the treasure-fleet—and there wasn't much left of Vigo.

"Now, deacon, are you going to play dog in the manger till the same thing happens to Falport or are you going to bring your terms down to a reasonable figure?"

"You've heard my terms and you can take 'em or leave 'em," snapped the deacon, displaying two broken rows of tobacco-stained teeth that made Swift think of tumble-down stone walls marking an old spite-lane.

"I'll leave 'em for a while and take a look around," said the captain, turning to the door.

"Look all you've a mind to," scoffed the deacon from the top of his high office-stool. "If you can buy or hire a team from anybody else in Falport today, bring the critters round and let me have a look at 'em."

"I will," promised the captain curtly.

He fled from the office because he knew that if he gazed for five seconds longer at Terwilliger's skinny, dangling ankles he would be unable to keep his hands off them. The temptation to pluck the deacon from his stool and swing him around his head—a feat well within the brawny privateersman's strength—was rapidly becoming irresistible.

"Guess I'll drop round to the tavern and see Joel Tenterden," soliloquized Captain Swift. "Being as he's town butcher as well as hotel-keeper, Joel ought to know the state of the cattle-market."

WALKING up Main Street, the privateersman entered the tavern bar and asked for the proprietor. The bartender jerked his thumb toward the rear of the premises.

"He's in the slaughter-house, out back. Goin' to kill and cut up a cow 'n her calf. Your crew ate up every mite of fresh meat in town at the banquet yesterday, cap'n. Must have tasted mighty good after a long cruise on salt horse. I'll bet those Britishers out there'd be glad to get some."

Swift, in the act of leaving the room, started and grinned. The garrulous bartender's words had given him an idea.

"Here, buy yourself a drink!" he cried, slamming a gold eagle down on the bar.

Thirty seconds later he bounded into the slaughter-house and seized Tenterden's upraised pole-axe just as it was about to fall on the head of a fat, complacent cow.

"Spare her life, Joel, and I'll buy her and the calf, just as they stand, at dining-room prices."

"They're yours," said the versatile Joel. "Want 'em sent aboard, cap'n?"

"Help me navigate 'em down Main Street and bring 'em to alongside Terwilliger's office. I'm going to have some fun with the stingy old hunks."

Followed by an amused and interested crowd, the two herded Asa's purchases down to the dingy little office, where the captain hammered on the door.

"Come out and look at my team, you old monopolist! Finest yoke of draft-cattle on Cape Cod!"

The deacon came forth, took one look and burst into high-pitched, derisive laughter.

"Hee! Hee! Hee! You poor ignorant sailorman! Callin' a milch caow and her calf a team!"

"Go ahead and laugh while you still feel like it," said Swift ominously. "I'll back old Sukey and her offspring here against all your horses and oxen. I'm going to make these two into a team that'll haul two thousand ton and leave you mourning in sackcloth and ashes amidst the ruins of your immoral monopoly. Give way, there, Sukey! Heave ahead, younker!"

The privateersman cheerfully prodded his livestock along the water-front toward the place where Ezra Starbuck's coasting sloop was moored, waiting for the blockade to be lifted.

"Durn his impudence! I'll raise his rates fifteen dollars a ton for that," muttered the deacon as he went back into his office.

"LARGE sloop standing out, sir," reported the officer of the deck to the captain of His Majesty's brig *Bruiser*, off Falport harbor. "Looks like a fisherman or a coaster."

"Pick the fellow up," said the captain curtly. "He'll be able to tell us something about that monstrosity in there. Dash it, Mr. Waldron, the thing's an impossibility!"

"It's a Yankee seventy-four, sir," insisted the lieutenant.

"Blue blazes, Mr. Waldron, there isn't such a thing afloat! I know their whole paltry navy-list by heart and there wasn't a single American ship-of-the-line in existence at the outbreak of hostilities, three months ago.

"They haven't had time to build one, that's clear. And all their half-dozen frigates together couldn't capture a seventy-four—she'd blow 'em out of the water with a broadside apiece if they had the impudence to try. Moreover, the Yankee frigates aren't together. but blockaded or cruising separately. And that two-decker in there hasn't been in action—that's plain—for there isn't a mark on her hull nor a rope-yarn missing aloft. She hasn't been built and she hasn't been captured, so where in Tophet did she come from, Mr. Waldron?"

"I couldn't say, sir. How'd you like a nice bit of fresh beef or a veal cutlet for dinner tonight, sir? That coaster chap has a cow and a calf on deck."

"By George, so he has! Summon him, Mr. Waldron."

A blank shot boomed from one of the *Bruiser's* chase-guns. The broad-beamed sloop gave up her clumsy attempt at flight and waited obediently for the brig to run down within hailing distance.

"I'll trouble you for that live-stock, my Yankee friend," shouted Mr. Waldron through his speaking-trumpet. "Fetch up under our lee and make fast alongside, so that we can hoist them aboard."

"All right, commodore," acquiesced the lean, gangling New Englander at the sloop's helm.

The sea was almost calm and the wind no more than a gentle breeze. The brig backed her main-tops'l and the coasting-skipper brought his craft alongside as neatly as he had ever docked at a wharf. Lines were thrown and made fast, and a double-whip bent to the starboard end of the *Bruiser's* foreyard.

The British crew, their mouths watering after three months of straight "salt junk," looked down with amused interest at the Yankee and his two deck-hands as they fitted the patient but puzzled cow with a broad canvas sling.

"All right!" shouted the lean New Englander. "Heave away!"

Up rose the astonished cow as a gang of blue-jackets hauled on the line. At the same instant, a three-foot strip of loosened deck planking, running from stem to stern along the sloop's rail on the side away from the brig, was lifted and thrown aside by a mysterious impulse from below.

Up through the trench-like opening sprouted a long row of tall brass-bound shakoes, sunburned faces, high leather stocks, and broad shoulders tightly uniformed in bottle-green.

"Fire!" roared Lieutenant Noah Bloggs, commanding the *Snapping Turtle's* marines.

Bullets and buckshot swept the *Bruiser's* crowded rail. Leaping out on deck, the Yankee privateer marines charged through the smoke, followed and accompanied by a swarm of seamen pouring up through hatch and companionway out of the crowded hold. Together they scrambled over the warship's side, driving her startled crew back from their guns before they could cast loose and fire a single carronade.

But the *Bruiser's* crew were a tough and sturdy lot. They fought with rammers, handspikes and capstan bars for lack of better weapons, till the watch below turned out with a cutlas apiece and another to throw to a shipmate. Outnumbered and unprepared, the English put up a plucky battle in the waist. Bayonets crossed with boarding-pikes, pistols cracked and blades clashed fiercely from fo'c'sle-head to poop.

The British captain, pressing forward at the head of the rallying afterguard, came face to face with the tall, lean Yankee helmsman of the sloop.

"Take that, you —— pirate!"

"Sorry I'm not in uniform," apologized Asa Swift as he parried the other's thrust. "But I guess I can fight just as well in homespun."

"Fired before you ran up your colors—hang you for that!" retorted the naval officer, lunging in carte.

"Showed you the color of our uniforms before we pulled a trigger. Don't you make fun of our marines' private regimentals—my partner's mighty proud of 'em. There! Guess you'd better give me what's left of your sword, captain."

Swift's heavy cutlas, skilfully swung, had snapped the Englishman's slighter blade short off.

"Take it!" barked the captain of the *Bruiser*, hurling the useless hilt in his foeman's face.

As Swift staggered back from the force of the blow, the other looked about him and saw that the day was lost. Except for the last stubborn stand of a few "die-hards," the fight was over and the brig in American hands.

Before any Yankee could overtake him the English captain turned and ran aft and below to his own cabin. There he snatched up a small volume and hurled it out through the open stern-window.

AS THE book left his hand, the thrower was thrust roughly aside. Looking up from where he fell on his hands and knees, the Englishman saw a long, lean body in gray homespun diving overboard through the cabin window.

Down dived Asa Swift, deeper and deeper, till his fingers touched and held the little book that had struck the water and sunk like a stone just before him. Up he came with aching lungs and a triumphant grin.

"Moo-oo!" said a protesting voice close beside him.

"Why, hello, Sukey!" said Swift, smiling into the agitated eyes of the cow. "You ought to be thankful you dropped into the water between the sloop and the brig, instead of staving yourself in on the gunwale when they let go the line. We'll pension you for life in a clover-field. It's no use your trying to swim ashore, old lady. You're still fast to the fore-yard."

The end of the whip-line had jammed in one of the blocks, towing the indignant Sukey stern-foremost in the wake of the two conjoined vessels, as they drifted slowly to leeward. Catching the bight of the rope, Swift shouted:

"Brig ahoy! Cow overboard!"

Noah Bloggs, in the act of hauling down the British ensign, looked astern and nearly fell overboard himself.

"What in creation are you doing down there, cap'n?"

"Been diving for pearls of wisdom and brought 'em up!"

With his free hand Captain Swift brandished the little book. Its covers were weighted with lead and lettered:

SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL
To be thrown overboard in case of capture

ALL Falport turned out to greet the victorious *Snapping Turtle's* crew when they brought the *Bruiser* into port. Deacon Terwilliger was the first man to grasp Swift's hand when he came ashore.

"I've been thinking over what you said about Vigo, cap'n, and I'm here to help you get your cargo up to Boston——"

"Glad to hear it, deacon. I'm taking the *Nabob* out on tonight's tide, and need twenty new hands to fill the places of our killed and wounded. Want to ship?"

"Deuteronomy!" gasped the deacon. "Have you gone plumb crazy? What other port could you take her to?"

"Boston or New York—whichever comes handiest."

"Just because you've captured a little brig by a trick, don't think you're a match for the hull British Navy!" shrilled Terwilliger warningly. "There's four—five—king's frigates off Sandy Hook and as many more off Boston. Long Island Sound is crawling with English cruisers, and the *Nabob's* too big to squeeze through Hell Gate anyway. How in creation are you ever goin' to get her through the blockade?"

"You and Sukey have fixed it all up for me between you," answered Swift mysteriously. "By the way, deacon, Colonel Dusenbury came aboard when we passed the fort and agreed to send the English prisoners up to Boston under a militia escort. He wants wagons for the wounded and I heard him say something about commandeering them if the price wasn't right. Guess you'd better go see——"

But the deacon had already gone.

THE *Nabob* cleared from Falport that night and raised Block Island at sunrise. With the first flush of dawn, Captain Asa Swift came forth from his cabin looking, from shoe-buckles to cocked hat, the image of a martinet R. N. captain of the period. Acknowledging the salute of a scarlet-coated sentry, he said some rather severe things about brass buttons and pipe-clay.

The captured white ensign and an admiral's broad pennant were hoisted with due and proper ceremony. Paint-brushes, pumice, and holystones were plied till noon in a relentless orgy of "spit and polish," followed by an inspection of the soaped and shaven crew in their captured British uniforms. The five letters cut into the bows and counter were chiseled out and neatly replaced by five others, completing the transformation of the *Nabob* into H. M. S. *Hawke*.

"I s'pose there's a real seventy-four of that name in the British Navy," surmised Noah Bloggs.

"I was pressed aboard her ten years ago last month," said Asa Swift, "when I was a foremast hand on the ship *Increase Mather* of Boston. The boarding-officer said I was English. I showed him my Falport birth certificate which I had taken to sea with me for that very purpose. He tore it up for a forgery, cursed me fore and aft for a canting sea-lawyer, and had his men throw me into his boat alongside. A nice pleasant officer to serve under was Lieutenant Carteret-Carstairs, R. N.

"He was our second luff and the rest were all of a piece. The *Hawke* was what the quarter-deck call a smart ship and the lower deck a floating ——. I put in three years aboard her, helped serve a gun at Trafalgar, and was a full-fledged bunting-tosser when I jumped her at Naples."

"Just what did you say you were, cap'n?"

"Bunting-tosser—signalman. That's how I knew enough to chase the brig's captain below and dive over after his cipher code-book. With that and the *Bruiser's* set of Popham's signals, Noah, I'm going to take command of the British blockading squadron off Sandy Hook."

"Great rolling hoop-snakes!" faltered Noah. "I thought we were just going to sail right on through!"

"If we tried anything so foolish they'd suspect and blow us out of the water! We've got to act natural, Noah; that's the only way to fool anybody. Now what's the natural thing for any admiral to do when he takes over a new command? To hoist the code signal for 'Captains to report aboard the flagship!'

"Aboard the — You don't mean to say you're going to *invite* those gimlet-eyed

English frigate-captains to come aboard us?"

"I certainly am. I'll be the fleet-captain and receive 'em one by one at the gangway, as they come aboard, and escort 'em aft to the cabin, where you're to be the admiral."

"What in creation! Me an admiral?"

"You've got to be old Sir Theobald Warrington, Vice-Admiral of the White. That's his pennant aloft there that I've cut out with my own hands."

"Mebbe it is but the good Lord never cut me out for a Tory admiral nor a play-actor neither," protested Noah Bloggs. "One look at me and one word out of my mouth and those Britishers will spot me for a Yankee."

"I guess they will," admitted Swift. "Particularly as you'll have an armed guard in the cabin with you to grab those Britishers and put 'em where the dogs won't bite 'em, as fast as I show 'em in. Soon as we get all the captains aboard and stowed away, we'll hoist another signal—

"'Disregard movements of the commander-in-chief.'"

"Then we'll run in as if we were trying to find out the strength of the new Sandy Hook batteries by drawing their fire, which is just the sort of thing old Warrington used to do off Toulon. When we're safe past the fleet, we'll run up the Stars and Stripes and head for New York."

"Suppose the forts misdoubt us and fill us full of cannon-balls, flag and all? Wouldn't it be safer to set somebody ashore on Long Island with a message and stand out to sea till he's had time to deliver it to the army officer in charge at Sandy Hook?"

"That's a smart idea, Noah. Trouble is, the news of our taking the *Nabob* off Finisterre must have left England some time ago, and I don't want to risk its reaching the blockading fleet before we do. So we'll hold on and try our luck this afternoon. By the way the wind's freshening, we ought to be off the Highlands by seven bells."

In the first dogwatch the *Nabob*, on the port tack and under all plain sail, bore boldly down on the British blockading squadron off Sandy Hook. The largest of the four frigates standing on and off there stood out to meet her. Suddenly a cloud of smoke puffed from a forward port, followed by the boom of a heavy gun.

"Godfrey's Cordial! He's firing at us!" cried Noah Bloggs.

"He's firing a vice-admiral's salute," corrected Swift as the blank discharges rolled from the British fleet. "Hoist that first signal. There go the acknowledgements! Back the topsails, Mr. Gifford, and lower a Jacob's ladder to leeward. Here comes the captain's gig from the nearest frigate and the others are pulling in his wake. Better go below and stand by with the reception committee, Noah."

The captain of H. M. S. *Achates*, forty-four, who up to now had been the "senior officer present," came alongside the supposed seventy-four, ascended the Jacob's ladder to the starboard gangway and exchanged salutes with the officer he found awaiting him there. Then the gallant captain turned a fine rich plum color with astonishment and rage.

"Swift—by gad!"

"Carteret-Carstairs!" ejaculated the equally astounded Swift.

FOR the moment both were too much surprized to do anything but stand and stare at each other. The spell was broken by the supposedly royal marine light infantryman who had been presenting arms beside them. Leveling his musket at the visitor, he asked in purest New England accents—

"Want me to drop him, cap'n?"

"No!" shouted Swift, knocking up the flintlock and throwing his arms about Carteret-Carstairs as the latter was about to dive overboard.

"Shove off!" shouted the Englishman to his boat's crew, who were staring up in astonishment at the amazing spectacle of two officers of high rank engaged in a wrestling match. "This craft is a —— Yankee in disguise! Shove off and warn the other gigs!"

"Let 'em alone!" commanded Swift as the American musketeers rushed to the *Nabob's* starboard rail. "I'll pistol the man who pulls a trigger."

Dragging the struggling Carteret-Carstairs inboard, he continued to give his orders.

"Square away for the port, Mr. Gifford—set flying-jib and stuns'ls. Haul down that signal and run up the other one."

"Will you have the goodness to release me?" said Captain Carteret-Carstairs freezingly as he realized the futility of his own efforts to shake off Swift's sinewy arms.

"Hope I haven't hurt you, captain," replied the genial Asa. "Keep your sword, sir. Would you prefer to go below under guard or give your parole and stay on deck to see the fun?"

"I'll stay," said Carteret-Carstairs, picking up his cocked hat and looking about him curiously.

He studied the spar-deck battery, which had been run in and secured behind closed ports, as was customary except in drill or action.

"Quakers, by gad! What sort of a packet is this, Swift?"

"Captain Swift, if you please, sir. Late East Indiaman *Nabob*, and my prize."

"If you'll surrender her to me now I'll do what I can for you at the court-martial," promised Carstairs. "You can't escape, you know."

"Guess I'll carry on a mite longer. Come up on the quarter-deck and watch the sport."

With the wind on her starboard quarter and every inch of canvas drawing, the *Nabob* was heading straight for the entrance to the Lower Bay. She had already overtaken and passed Carteret-Carstairs' gig, whose crew were pulling sturdily toward the other two boats that were approaching from a couple of frigates lying a mile to the northward and almost directly in the American's course. The *Achates* was hove to about half a mile to the eastward.

"You see, you're practically surrounded," said Carteret-Carstairs to his captor.

"What harm does that do?" asked Swift. "Your fleet aren't going to fire on their own flagship, are they?"

"They'll find out the fraud directly my gig meets the other two. It was very clever as well as very decent of you not to fire when I ordered her away."

"And mighty plucky of you to give the warning. Soon as you did, I began to shift my plans. No sense trying to pick up those other captains now. Even your cox'n ought to realize that by this time. But he'll keep on and warn the other two gigs because you ordered him to and he's been trained to obey without thinking.

"It will take him four minutes more to reach them. There's no way of signaling from a small boat. It will take at least six minutes for one of them to pull against the wind to the *Achates* and give the alarm. This ship's logging twelve knots. Ten minutes from now we'll be a long sea mile on the other side of those two frigates ahead there. Figure it out for yourself, captain."

"Humph!" said Captain Carteret-Carstairs.

He said nothing more, even when the *Nabob* was passing between the two British frigates and within easy hailing distance of each. The other Yankee officers looked uneasily at the prisoner, who they knew would gladly risk his own life to warn his friends. But Asa Swift knew the Carteret-Carstairs' code better than they.

As he had foretold, the two frigates were more than a mile astern and Sandy Hook a scant league ahead, when the watchers on the *Nabob's* quarter-deck saw the *Achates* break out into a sudden rash of bunting.

"Spelling it out—no words for it in the code," chuckled Swift.

Stooping to the cabin skylight, he called:

"Below there, Mr. Bloggs. Have your marines take off those red coats and put on their green ones."

Doffing his cocked hat, the Yankee captain removed the royal cockade and replaced it with one embossed with an eagle. There was practically no other difference between the British and American naval uniforms of the period.

"Haul down the white ensign and run up our own."

At the sight of the Stars and Stripes, the bow-chasers spoke from the three frigates now in pursuit. But the shots splashed far astern in the *Nabob's* wake.

"Out of range and falling astern. Guess all we've got to worry about is that little cuss to the westward."

THE fourth and smallest frigate of the bloackading fleet had been cruising back and forth inshore, just out of range of the Sandy Hook batteries. Now, having picked up her captain, she was on the starboard tack and running on a course that would soon intercept the *Nabob's*.

"She's standing down mighty boldly for her size," said Swift, studying the oncoming frigate through his telescope. "Looks like the little old *Audacious*, thirty-six."

Carteret-Carstairs nodded.

"She's commanded by a chap who's worthy of her name. He'd tackle you if you were a real seventy-four instead of a sham. You'll need more than wooden guns to beat him off."

"Well, I've got a Long Tom and some light carronades out of the *Snapping Turtle,*" drawled Asa Swift. "Looks like your friend was getting ready to give us a broadside."

The two ships were rapidly approaching each other on the converging lines of an acute angle. As soon as the *Audacious* came within range, she let drive with her entire starboard battery. A few eighteen-pound solid-shot buried themselves deep in the *Nabob's* massive timbers, while the rest flew shrieking overhead, punching neat round holes through the straining canvas, cutting stays and halyards, splintering masts and spars. Obviously the frigate's gunners were aiming high, to cripple the fugitive and check her flight till the pursuers astern could come within range.

A second broadside followed; then a third. But gunnery was a despised and neglected art on most ships of the British Navy in 1812. What little damage was done was repaired by the *Nabob's* nimble seamen before anything carried away.

Observing this and being a firm believer in Nelson's maxim that if you get near enough to the enemy you can not miss, the captain of the *Audacious* decided to hold his fire until the two ships were within easy musket-shot. Then he would wear and continue on a parallel course, pounding the Yankee hammer and tongs.

But Asa Swift had not served three years in the Royal Navy without learning its routine tactics. Anticipating this very maneuver, he uttered a crisp command. Round swung the *Nabob's* head to port, and across the narrow strip of water between them she hurled herself straight at the frigate's broadside.

By all the contemporary rules of the game the *Audacious* should have raked the *Nabob* fore and aft. But nothing is so nerve-shaking as the utterly unexpected. Ramming had gone out with oars and not yet come back with steam. At the sight of their huge adversary charging bows-on and looming high above them, the astonished gunners hit nothing in particular.

But there was nothing whatever the matter with their captain's seamanship. His crew were well drilled, the *Audacious* was French-built and uncommonly handy, and her head was already beginning to fall off to leeward. Round she swung on her heel so smartly that the *Nabob* only struck her a glancing blow on the starboard quarter and then came rubbing and grinding alongside.

"Grapple her! Grapple her! Stand by to board!" rang the commands from the English frigate.

The *Audacious* had a crew of two hundred and forty men; the *Nabob* a scant hundred. And so many of those were needed to handle the East Indiaman's cumbersome top-hamper that a scant two dozen were left to man the port rail.

Each of these men held a large gunny-sack containing some heavy, cylindrical object. Snatching a lighted linstock from the fuse-tub placed beside him, each Yankee thrust it into the mouth of the sack, as if igniting a fuse. Then swinging the sack with all the strength of his sturdy arms, he hurled it over the rail to fall on the crowded deck of the *Audacious.*

Captain Carteret-Carstairs, looking down from the *Nabob's* lofty poop, saw the falling gunny-sacks burst like shells, some in mid-air, others as they struck the deck. Through the smoke of the explosions he could see men stagger and fall as the close-packed masses were riddled by a myriad missiles.

Bullets and jagged fragments hummed and shrieked through the air about him, or fell pattering unnoticed at his feet. But the *Nabob* towered so high above the frigate that her own crew were comparatively sheltered.

More of the uncouth projectiles came hurtling down from the tops, where the green-coated marines were briskly exchanging shots with their red-coated foes. These bombs burst with less noise and scattered a burning powder that gave out clouds of pale smoke. Whoever breathed it burst into a violent fit of coughing and sneezing, while tears poured from his eyes.

Holding wet sponges over their eyes and noses, the *Nabob's* men hacked blindly at the grapnels till the last one parted and the two ships drew apart. As the clean wind swept away the awful fumes, Carteret-Carstairs heard a tremendous crash aloft. Looking up with streaming eyes, he saw the mizzen topmast dangling. It had been shot off just above the cap.

Looking astern, he saw that the other three frigates were now within range and firing rapidly. The *Audacious* was steering wildly, with flapping sails, as if there was no one at the helm. Dense clouds of smoke were still pouring up from her deck and men were leaping overboard.

A forty-two pound shot flew screaming past to seaward and plumped into the water between the *Achates* and her nearest consort. The Sandy Hook batteries were now able to take a hand in the game. Twenty minutes later the baffled blockaders stood out to sea, while the *Nabob* entered the Lower Bay and bore up for the Narrows.

"What," demanded Captain Carteret-Carstairs, indicating the only gunny-sack that had not been thrown, "is in that?"

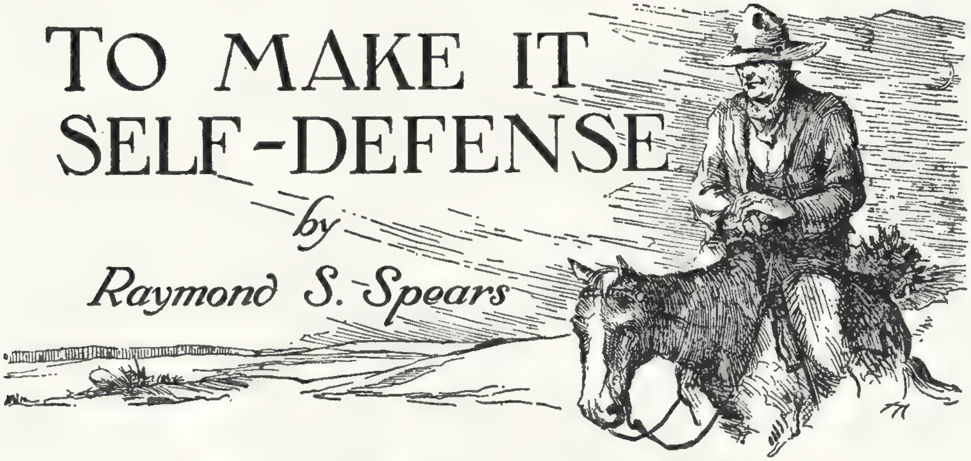
"Two gallon earthenware jar," replied Asa Swift. "Found a lot of 'em on this ship when we captured her. Filled some with grape-shot, gun-flints, and a charge of powder. Loaded the others with brimstone, sulphur and pepper—tons of it below. I'm sorry for those poor devils astern, but we're too short-handed to beat 'em off any other way."

"—— nasty Yankee trick!" said Carteret-Carstairs.

"I'll admit it was nasty," said Asa Swift; "but I'm glad to hear you admit that I'm a Yankee. If you'd only done so ten years ago, it would have saved a lot of trouble for both of us."

TO MAKE IT SELF-DEFENSE

by Raymond S. Spears



Author of "River Laughter," "The Spirit Behind the Bluff," etc.

JET LETARE owned the Tick-Tack-Toe brand ranch down in the Curly Grass Creek basin. He had picked up sixteen sections in the old days, when picking was really good. Now he regarded with satisfaction the fact that he owned a number of squares in a checker-board of Bad Lands. His sections were not all in a block. Instead, his squares touched only here and there at corners because vacant spaces, all government owned, were spread out among his deeded acres. Thus, instead of controlling his mere 10,240 acres, he had all the known water on at least 30,000 acres of grazing country, broken with the gray washes and dome-buttes that characterized the watershed of Curly Grass Creek.

The rancher was a dark, taciturn, bow-legged, barrel-shaped man. He wore his broad-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes, and his fixed stare was like the cold hate of a mink. He rode a horse or killed it—sometimes both. He was a hard employer. His ranch crew were hard men; six to eight of the number who did his bidding wore guns as of old, and sometimes arrived in the night, and departed in the night.

Trails led in all directions from the clump of cottonwoods on a flat thirty feet above the level of the creek, in which stood the rambling, sod-covered ranch-house, which was built of cottonwood logs, and which showed only small windows, with four six-by-nine sheets of wrinkly old glass. A huge stick and mud chimney indicated the position of the fire-place. A tall galvanized

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"To Make It Self-Defense," copyright, 1921, by Raymond S. Spears.

pipe was braced with many wires against the constant wind from out of the prairies, and beneath this part of the rambling shack roof was a he cook who roasted beef, or veal, boiled vegetables, baked dough-biscuits some of which were hard and heavy enough to be used as deadly missiles.

Few neighbors came to visit the Tick-Tack-Toe outfit, and then usually in a small bunch to make inquiries about certain cattle believed to have wandered off their natural range. These neighbors knew with whom they had to deal. Times had changed in the recent twenty years, and Letare did not openly resent their visits.

Usually he knew what they sought, and they rode away again having located their cattle. Yet if a dozen cattle strayed away, one was likely to remain permanently missing. This was expected. Jet could hardly be expected to refrain absolutely from the practises which had given him his money to take up, buy up, bull-doze and otherwise overcome the titles to the lands he had acquired.

While the railroad was building over the prairies, forty or fifty miles north of Curly Grass, Jet Letare was scouting down in those same Bad Lands. He had ridden into them from away off toward the southwest, judging by his tracks. What was along the back-trail none cared to inquire. Jet was unkempt, unshaven, ragged, riding an old saddle on a wild horse. His boots were out at the ankles and split along the seams, and the heels turned on their nubs when he walked.

The railroad needed meat, or at least the cook-shacks of the contractors did. All that beautiful country was decked and spotted with bunches of cattle. Jet Letare skinned a beef one night, soaked the hair off, and then cut the raw hide into long, wonderfully even strings.

He soaked these strings carefully in rain-water, and then looped them loosely over a long pole. In each loop he hung a weight of ten or fifteen pounds, and let the stretched strings hang until they were dry. He soaked and stretched and dried the thongs four times. Then he braided the strings, once more soaked, into a riata. He worked every cross and weave into a contact that was drawn as tight as his strong hands could do it.

When he had finished, he had a rope nearly forty-four feet long. It was from end to end, very slightly tapered toward the noose, which was beautifully worked and spliced. It was just over three-eighths of an inch at the large end, and a hair's breadth under that at the noose. When he had dressed the line, he tossed it about to try it, and smiled a satisfied, grim smile.

With that rope he sallied forth to make his fortune, and he made it. He carried one other tool, a knife. From the hour the riata was finished, he hardly knew rest. He rode away east to meet the coming railroad. He was never seen at the camp by day. He lurked on the flanks, north or south, where almost no one ever saw him. He rode nearly always at night, invariably alone.

Others, too, were riding. He might have had a whole company with him, but he wanted no friends, needed no help, save that given by his little *ramuda*, his several horses which he carefully picked for their carrying qualities and endurance.

When the road was built, Jet Letare was rich. He had many thousands of dollars. When cowboy detectives rode up and down, looking for the lost cattle of the several great ranch outfits that had grazed all those regions, leasing lands from the Indians, but seldom paying for them, there was no trace of the cattle that had vanished on open prairie, and in cut-bank draw, and the bands of cattle killers were broken up, scattered, and some bad-men sent to jail.

Jet Letare shrugged his shoulders, saying—

"The only man that doesn't squeal on you, in the pinch, is yourself!"

Quietly he gathered in the Bad Land acres that he now loved, whose possibilities were wonderful as he well knew. He bought out anxious and disappointed homesteaders; he took up abandoned claims, paying a little ready cash for each section, while a first class lands' attorney saw to it that there was no missing link in Letare's claims to the Bad Lands which he was taking on.

Years went on, one after another. Any uneasiness Letare might have had about the past flattened away, and vanished with the old days. No bad dreams rose to haunt him. His possession weathered investigations. There was no need of his worrying now. No crime could hold against him, with the passing of each statute of limitations. He was all clear, living honestly.

His own white-faced Herefords wandered up and down where twenty years before white-faced bulls had been introduced among the lank, rangy cattle to improve their weight, improve their beef, and tone them up to higher market value. Letare smiled as he watched his own pure-breds. They were beeves to be proud of. When he shipped, it was to have his stock corn-fed, stall-fed, because people were willing to pay extra prices for that kind, and he received that cent or two a pound on the hoof, which proved it was cheaper to raise good cattle than scrubs, a lesson many a rancher and farmer had yet to learn.

Years of complaisance, however, did not cause Jet Letare to relax in his vigilance. He was himself peaceable; he committed no overt acts; he lived clean, even when there was temptation on the one hand to share the illicit profits of modern raiding methods, or on the other, to ride with men who came inviting him to "a little fun."

Away off yonder, the Milk River boys were always up to some devilment. A number of them paid Jet occasional visits, sure of welcome, sure of pleasant talks about old times when the Wild Bunch were on the romp, but unable to persuade Jet to cut loose again.

In his own little domain, however, he had a wild gang of cowboys to control. They were bad. He liked them because they were bad. They came to his place, finding it a convenient, far-back, out-of-the-way shelter. They must work, however. There were occasional disputes.

Jet Letare, more than once, in the cause of injustice set men afoot with their saddles, and the thirty or forty mile walk along any of the devious trails did not at all appease the angry feelings of the men dismounted. Rumors around that there were killings on Curly Grass Creek were not confirmed by court action. Letare had lost nothing in his ancient gun-draw skill, and he never rode without his revolvers.

INTO Letare's domain, not three miles from his ranch-house, came Bob Alvorn. No one at Letare's knew Bob had arrived, till Bob had homesteaded the 640 acres which Letare had used for years as his horse pasture. It was government land, arid on the maps, and subject to the claim of any man who was fool enough, or brave enough, to take it.

There, on a low knoll, Bob built a sod house, with double-thick walls, and a command of view extending three hundred yards in any direction. Right beside the sod-house, Bob sank a well, and, at thirty feet, struck an underground river, which squirted a four-inch stream six feet high, not thirty feet from the sod house. His wife, a comely woman, rejoiced.

Bob had money enough to buy a few head of cattle, which he promptly fenced in. He plowed up a hundred acres with a little tractor. He pushed an old prairie schooner trail into the old North-and-South Pike, bought a little flivver, and minded his own business.

Jet Letare rode over to Corbeau, the county seat, and visited around for a week. His lawyer reported to him that Bob's claim couldn't be touched, for it had been declared arid, and luck had favored the homesteader. The water, the 640 acres, the choice bit of grazing land was the claimant's, to have if he could hold it.

Jet was very careful in his approaches at the county court. He heard there one thing that bade him pause.

"Jet," the prosecuting attorney said, "if you kill that man, you'll hang. If any of your men kill him, the sheriff and a posse, sure as living, will come and break you to pieces. Those old days are gone. I know what you are thinking, and it is premeditated murder. It won't do. You can't get away with it. Buy him out, or let him stay."

"There's no way. That's my country! That underground river flows right across my land——"

"And if you take it from him, blast it, or blow it, or tap it, he's a valid claim against you—for ten thousand dollars damages. Besides, he'll get the water, too, in addition."

"He won't sell!"

"Why the —— should he?"

"And there's no way?"

Jet pressed the question.

"Well—" and the prosecutor grinned—"if he pulls his gun on you, and you kill him, that's self-defense. But it's got to be a cinch. You'll have to prove to the jury that it's self-defense—and they'll be mostly homesteaders, who haven't much sympathy for old-time ranchers, for there are lots of them starving to death on lands that ought never to have been taken from ranching and grazing, for homesteading. You know that. They think the cattlemen were to blame."

"Yes, but——"

"No buts about it, Letare. If you shoot Bob Alvorn, you'll hang, if I'm prosecutor. Don't forget that. We aren't going to have this country all shot up by a lot of murdering old-timers. We can't afford it. Why, nobody is going to come out here, to settle down, if you can go in and shoot anybody that takes land legally, when you're holding it, grazing it, and grabbing it. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I know—but if I kill him in self-defense?"

"You'll prove it! If it isn't on Bison street, with a crowd looking on, every one seeing you in danger of your life, you'll hang. That's all. The circumstantial evidence that you've killed him will grow stronger, the further back you do it. Understand?"

"But on Bison street—he draws first, he starts to kill me?"

"Oh, then the grand jury, over my demand, will likely enough exonerate you!"

Prosecutor Habrey laughed.

Jet Letare rode away in his big automobile. A little smile flickered on his lips. He felt that he needed a little excitement. In his day, he had ridden alone; he could do it again; he knew the Bad Lands as they feel when a scouter listens beside a bit of a chip fire, when the coyotes howl in the hills, their voices making echoes among the sliding faces of the buttes.

A week later he rode away to the train, a score of people seeing him take his departure. A week later, the sheriff and three deputies were at his ranch, and talked half the night with the cowboys. They were all in the big bunk room. In the morning, eleven of Bob Alvorn's cattle were lying in their pasture, their throats cut, their hides cut to ribbons, and their meat slashed beyond use.

Alvern was hit a body blow by that trick. The sheriff and deputies rode over to see what had been done. There were witnesses that not one of Letare's men had been abroad that night. Letare was registered in a hotel in St. Louis. He returned a week later. When he stopped in Corbeau, the prosecuting attorney looked him in the eye and said—

"You son of a gun!"

Letare began to entertain sportsmen, hunters from down east who enjoyed killing prairie chickens and shooting wild fowl in the sloughs, of which there were a few in the Bad Lands bottoms in old stream beds. Five of these perfectly reputable people were ready to swear that it was impossible for any of the Letare outfit to have blown up the west end of Alvorn's sod-house. Dynamite did it—but by a freak, left one small room of the four the homesteader had put into the building.

Ten pounds of nails in the old prairie school trail up the basin of Curly Grass was only a little thing, but it ruined four tires on the flivver that Bob Alvorn drove. He picked up a hundred of the wire stubs, and drove to Corbeau to show Attorney Habrey what had happened.

"You know what I'm getting," Alvorn said. "Eleven head killed, my house dynamited, and now this trick."

"I've heard about it," Habrey admitted. "Want to swear out a warrant?"

"I have no evidence. I came here to tell you I want protection. You call the sheriff!"

Habrey hesitated. Then, without a word he called Sheriff Darnell, who came right over from the jail. To him Alvorn recited his list of misfortunes.

"Sheriff," Alvorn said, "I want protection. I am peaceable. My house was blown up when I was with my wife here in town."

"I'll arrest any man in the world, if there's a warrant out for him," the sheriff declared, virtuously.

"But you won't protect a homesteader who's being blown, butchered, and nagged out of house and—and homestead?" Alvorn asked.

"What can I do?"

"You are the sheriff, and this man is the prosecuting attorney," Alvorn said slowly. "You were elected to protect people in this county from rascals. I'm square. I never stole a head of cattle to sell to a railroad contractor, never killed a man to get his lands, never sucked around the politicians to find protection—if I did meanness. I've brought here a written request, stating the facts to you two men. It's up to you to give me protection."

"What if we don't—I mean can't?" the attorney demanded quickly.

"I think you'd better—or resign, and give somebody else a chance," Alvorn said, as he walked away.

The two gazed after him. Their faces were flushed. The prosecuting attorney clicked his teeth:

"That —— Letare's hog-tied everything with his alibis, but he's going too far. Go tell him, Darnell, he's rushing things too fast!"

The sheriff exclaimed—

"Go tell him yourself!"

"I don't have to—but you do!"

IT WAS six months before anything else happened. Then one night as Alvorn rode across the timber-bridge over the Stone-wall fork of the main highway, the whole thing collapsed. The automobile was smashed. Alvorn broke his leg. Mrs. Alvorn escaped without injury. Timbers had been sawed.

While Alvorn was lying in his new sod house, waiting for the injuries to heal, and the bone to knit, Mrs. Alvorn worked the tractor, and cared for the stock. She carried two steers in the truck Alvorn had bought, and sold them to a cattle buyer at the railroad. On her way home in the dark, she was held up, the money taken away, the truck crippled by breaking the spark plugs.

She walked five miles to the nearest house, borrowed an automobile and rode to Corbeau. There she told the sheriff, who rode out to the scene, taking an automobile mechanic and spare parts to the crippled machine. One man had held the woman up and robbed her. Darnell went on to Letare's ranch and found all hands there.

"Letare," Darnell said, "I didn't suppose there was a bandit or holdup west of the Missouri who would attack a woman."

"Nor I," Letare replied. "What's happened?"

Sheriff Darnell told him. Letare listened, then summoned all his cowboys and they rode all day long looking for the lone miscreant. Darnell, riding with them, seeing the cowmen drag the washes, ransack the Bad Lands, and make their search could not doubt the evidence of his eyes. Yet when he left Letare that night, he said:

"You're a fool, Letare! Nobody is being fooled!"

"Yes, they are, sheriff," he replied. "What have you these suspicions against me for?"

Darnell looked at him, and then rode away. He knew the rancher was grinning. He told the prosecuting attorney about it. Habrey cursed.

"A man don't get away with molesting women out here," the lawyer said. "Letare's a fool!"

"Except you can't catch him," Darnell grumbled. "What's his game, anyhow?"

Habrey looked at him for a minute, and then said:

"Self-defense. He aims to nag Alvorn till the homesteader makes a break."

"He can't get away with it!"

"He can if he waits till Alvorn draws his gun first."

"But Alvorn will bush-whack him!"

"That's the worst of it. Alvorn's clean. He came from the Ozark mountains where they never shoot a man from the brush, but spring all clear before they draw their guns."

"Can he shoot?"

"I don't know. Probably not—at least not with Letare. Letare bought five thousand forty-five caliber revolver cartridges three months ago. Yesterday he came in and bought five thousand more. He's practising every day."

"The son of a gun!" Darnell exclaimed.

"There's not a chance against him. You know that."

"Yes—and you can't prove anything. There isn't even decent circumstantial evidence!"

Two days later, Jet Letare rode into town. He went to the hardware store and bought five thousand more forty-five caliber revolver cartridges. It was all the place had in stock.

"What's the matter, Jet?" Sheriff Darnell asked, happening in.

"Doing a little practising."

"Must be getting ready for a little war out there! You took five thousand shoots on Tuesday."

"A devil of a note—the box slipped out the back of the truck, and we didn't miss it till we reached the ranch. Went back after it, but couldn't find—um-m."

Sheriff Darnell turned. Mrs. Alvorn had entered the store, to buy a flap-jack grid. She smiled a bright recognition to all the men but one. She gave Letare a cold, expressionless look different from any she would have directed at a mere stranger.

A whisper had begun to run around. Jet Letare was nagging Bob Alvorn. The homesteader was a stranger in those parts, after a fashion. He was a hard worker, steady and ambitious. Luck had been with him, finding that fine water, and his wheat had brought him a little fortune. He was out of the worst of his agriculture difficulties, having broken the sod, and his possession was assured, if he could live to take out his final papers.

Three times in the next four weeks, Letare rolled into Corbeau while Mrs. Alvorn was in town. Shortly after she took her departure, he followed her.

People could think what they pleased! Bob was nursing his broken leg at home. The road winding away from the railroad, across the prairies, and into the Bad Lands was a long, lonely trail. Great hills rose to flat-topped buttes. There were great valleys that were miles wide. At one place, where the road dipped into the Yellow River bottoms, the Bad Lands extended for a hundred miles toward the south.

A few had homesteaded on the road to the Yellow River, but beyond this stream there were only two little ranches, besides that of Letare and the homestead of Bob Alvorn. For a score of miles or more, the road was under no one's eyes, and people wondered if the rancher and the homesteader's wife ever met to talk out there in the wide spaces?

Letare was well satisfied. He had succeeded in his enterprise. His men listening around, heard the gossip, which was inevitable. The rancher knew when Alvorn began to move around on crutches; he knew when Alvorn discarded one of the crutches; he knew when Alvorn merely eased his game leg by carrying a cane; he thought he knew all there was to know about Bob Alvorn.

Bob rode with his wife in to Corbeau in their truck. They carried a ton of wheat with them, which was sucked up into the Grangers' Elevator. Bob went down to the hardware store, to buy some hay-bale wire, for he had some alfalfa to pack. The store-keeper was alone at the moment. Having made sure of this fact, the gray little man leaned over the counter and said:

"Bob, Jet Letare's been following your wife out and in— They say he 'lows to get you!"

"He 'lows to get me?"

"That's so! He dasn't to bush-whack you, account of that being murder. He 'lows to git to nag yo' to pull your gun fustest, an' then— You see?"

"I see—now! Wants to plead self-defense."

"Jes' so! He's bought a sight of shoots from me, but he's no friend of mine. Eighteen years ago, he killed my brother, who was scouting down on his ranch. It was cold blood. I never said a word. You're a good man, and I've given you fair warning—which few of his dead men ever had."

"And he wants me to pull first, eh?" Bob asked, eagerly.

"Just so—sh-h! No 'fense, suh—but yo' wife— He's talking——"

"It's all right—about my wife. Never doubt it," Bob whispered, as he gathered up the fifty weight of hay-bale wire.

Bob put the wire into his truck, and tied it fast. Then he went over to the sheriff's office, to sit down.

"Have a cigar, sheriff?" Bob asked.

"Sure thing, Bob!"

"I came to tell you, sheriff, that two of my horses died yesterday. I cut them open and found they'd been fed glass and oatmeal."

"That's a —— shame, Bob!" Darnell exclaimed, angrily.

"You didn't find the men who sawed off those bridge beams, when I was to be the last man through the trail that night?"

"Bob, so help me I searched——"

"All right, sheriff. I know you did. I don't bear any hard feelings against any man in the world. Don't forget that. I am peaceable. If I could prove who is after me, trying to drive me out of the country, I'd do it. As long as I can't, why that's my fault. A man has to protect himself, up to a certain point, and I suppose I'm the one who's to blame. Keep watch, will you?"

"I surely shall!" the sheriff promised, and Bob rose to take his departure. He limped a little as he walked out ahead of the sheriff. Darnell followed him. As they cleared the doorway and stood on the jail office porch, Bob stopped short.

Across the street, about a hundred feet distant, was Jet Letare. Down the street was the automobile he had just driven in to town. He was walking to meet Mrs. Alvorn, who was carrying some packages in her arms toward the Alvorn truck.

Letare stopped in front of her, as she tried to avoid him. But the rancher was looking across the street at the jail, as well he might. Thus he covered himself, and all the spectators could swear that his insult to Mrs. Alvorn was accidental. Two packages fell from her hands as she sprang back, angrily, leaving him all clear.

"I didn't think you'd—here!" he said, in his sharp, shrill voice, throwing his head back so that the brim of his hat stood up, giving his eyes clear view, which he needed. He had given his open challenge at last.

Bob Alvorn dropped back one step, to Sheriff Darnell's side, and snatched the officer's forty-five caliber, seven-and-a-half-inch barreled revolver from its right hand holster. Then, after the manner of the Ozark Mountain Bald Knobbers, he sprang clear of the shade, across the sidewalk into the dust of the street. He took long chances, making that honest jump. His leg was still weak, and it might break again.

He landed square in mid-sunshine, which was out of the west, fair for each of the two men. Alvorn had a drawn revolver, but he held the muzzle pointed straight down. Letare hesitated. It was the making sure that his plea of self-defense would hold good.

Then Letare snatched his own revolvers from his hips. He had two. As they cleared the holsters, Alvorn with incredible swiftness shot the right one from the rancher's hand, smashing the wrist that supported it. Then Alvorn shot the other arm of Letare, pulverizing the elbow joint.

Letare, when his two revolvers fell to the ground, threw both arms into the air, and screamed for his life as the broken ends lopped down.

Attorney Habrey came running. He watched the two men, victor and vanquished, hesitating exactly what to do, which side to take in this affair. He compromised, turning to Alvorn, demanding—

"Why the —— didn't you finish this job?"

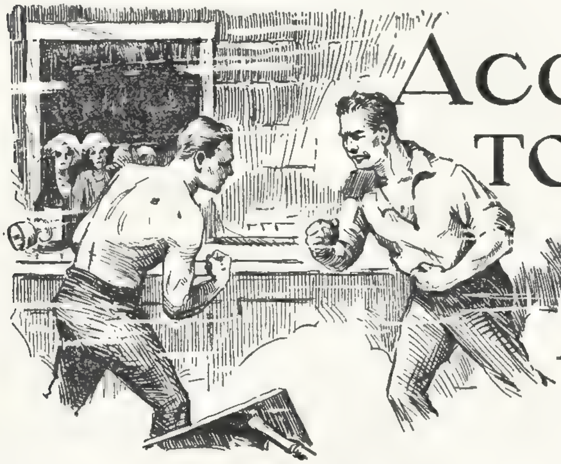
"I have done my part. Now you do yours! And you, too, sheriff!" Alvorn said, deliberately. "For years you've watched that scoundrel hound me, and let him do it. Go to it, sheriff! Go arrest him——"

"Look here—" Habrey interrupted.

"Or I'll go telegraph the governor a demand for your removal!"

Habrey turned white. Sheriff Darnell turned blue lipped.

"Go get him!" Habrey shuddered. "Arrest him, sheriff— You know—we all got to be witnesses. The charge is attempted murder!"



ACCORDING TO THE LAW

by F. A. M. Webster

HALF a dozen men were sitting in the back room of Benjamin's bar in Johannesburg, wishing that something would turn up. They had finished playing poker a couple of hours ago, the remittance man's last instalment from home being by that time completely exhausted.

A native boy had just brought in the eighth instalment of whisky and water; and the little room was so thick with smoke and so stuffy with the horrid, pungent fumes of Boer tobacco that the average man would not have been able either to see or breathe. To the six inmates of the room the foul and foggy atmosphere seemed to make no difference at all.

The doctor had just finished a long yarn about the killing of a big sable antelope and a subsequent startling adventure with vultures when his hunting partner had left him to guard the carcass against their depredations.

"I was pretty green in those days," he concluded, "and I shall always think that Schmidt knew the danger and left me to it, as a means of paying off a grudge he held against me; for a little plain speaking I had been forced to earlier in the day, as to his right to the use of my personal property."

An old prospector leaned forward across the table, spreading his sinewy arms carefully among the glasses, and stared through the smoke in the doctor's direction.

The prospector was not prepossessing. He was a man of over sixty years of age, whose countenance the African sun had scorched and dried to the yellowness of old parchment. His chin and cheeks were thatched with a straggling growth of thin, iron-gray hair; a big, soft hat flopped untidily over his eyes. The ragged shirt he wore was glazed with dirt; the sleeves, rolled back to the elbows, disclosed arms extraordinarily muscular and well formed for a man of his age.

"What was Schmidt, a back-*veld* Boer?" he queried.

In answer to the doctor's affirmation the prospector laughed softly. A peculiarly mirthless laugh.

"I thought so," he said; "they're all the same—dirty-white, with a yellow streak. Some of the things that go on in those back-*veld* farms would turn a Kaffir sick and send a white man, with any morals, mad. But I'll say for them, they're good haters."

"Hate," said the remittance man softly, "and the yellow streak; they are not confined entirely to the Boers."

The bank manager coughed discreetly, for he knew the story of Wainwright, who had spoken.

"I have often thought," continued Wainwright, "that the smallest offenses breed the biggest enmities."

"I don't agree with you there," said the doctor. "A man must have a pretty good cause for offense, before he works up what I should call a real 'killing' hate. Of course, with the Latin races it is different. They are so infernally touchy and excitable that one can never tell how to deal with them. Look at their vendettas, for example. A man treads on another man's toes and their descendants, for untold generations, magnify the incident into cause for an unending blood feud."

"But surely the same state of things appertains in England, to a less dangerous degree," interposed the bank manager. "Otherwise how do you account for those extraordinary lawsuits, in the long course of which a prosperous man will beggar himself for the sake of an unimportant right of way?"

"Law," said the old prospector, spitting contemptuously. "I don't think much of your civilized laws, that send a poor devil of a starving woman to jail for stealing a loaf, and yet let one of these —— slave-driving, gold-grubbing company-promoters, who have ruined Africa, skin widows and half-witted children bare of every bean they possess."

"But, my friend," replied the bank manager, "laws are made by civilized peoples for the greater comfort of the whole community. Without them society could not exist."

"And you think that laws, which are so involved as to supply plenty of loopholes for clever thieves, wife-stealers and murderers to slip through are good laws, do you?" asked the prospector bitterly.

"I tell you," he went on, banging his fist down, so that the glasses leaped upon the table, "that there is no law in the world so just as the law of the wild. 'First blood is hunters' meat.' What could be fairer than that. For it saves all dispute as to who fired the fatal shot. In the wilds we are governed by nature, we kill the man who carries off our women and we wipe out a deadly insult in blood. Primitive law if you like, but it is Bible law, none the less. 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life.' "

A long silence followed this apparently irrefutable contention; and it seemed that a fruitful source of argument must lie fallow, for want of further material upon which to feed.

Suddenly Benjamin, the barkeeper, pushed open the door and shuffled forward to the table.

" 'Red Jake's' dead!" he said, and paused expectantly for the rain of questions which he knew must follow; for a death always excites interest, in any community.

In this particular case only Benjamin and the old prospector, Jim Lyall, had been long enough in the country to remember the wild days which had provided an adequate setting for Red Jake's hectic career.

"How'd it happen?" asked the prospector, fanning the smoke away from his face.

"An old native, named Umpomba, went out with him hunting lion and got him with an assegai, while he was asleep. The Mounted Police have just brought the "boy" in. You remember him, Jim; he was the fellow who gave evidence against Jake at the trial, and, after it was over, swore that he'd revenge his sister if he had to wait a lifetime. Well, he's waited thirty years, and now he's done it."

"There you are," said Lyall, to the company at large. "There are two cases of hate, which ought to settle your arguments."

"What's the story, Jim?" asked the doctor. "I've heard of this man, Red Jake, as a dangerous character, and I know that he was tried for murder a good many years ago; but it was so long before my time that I never heard any details of the case."

"Well, it's a pretty complicated tale," said Lyall, "but I'll do my best to tell it, unless Benjamin here would rather spin the yarn."

"Not me," said Benjamin. "I'm no good at the talking—besides I've got to keep my eye on the bar; but I'll stay and listen, for old times' sake.

II

THINGS weren't as orderly out here in the early nineties, as they are now (Lyall commenced). Southern Rhodesia was the frontier, as far as South Africa was concerned, and Fort Victoria was the first settlement founded in Mashonaland, by the Pioneer Column of the Chartered Company. Speaking generally, it was a quiet, well-ordered little settlement; but on Saturday nights things were apt to get a bit complicated.

Most days if you wandered into the main street you'd find a dog making things unpleasant for his insect friends, and, probably a couple of native women taking snuff outside the little store; the company's maps showed a township of six streets, seven avenues, a market square, a church and a museum; as a matter of fact there was one street, comprising four or five shanties, and some tin-roofed out-buildings, running from the Drift to the Thatched House.

Some men had offices, which they used mostly as lumber rooms; if they wanted to do business they went to the Thatched House, which was our one hotel, where everybody fed and where the whole life of the town centered.

In Victoria we did everything collectively, from celebrating a birthday to burying a member of the community.

Under the circumstances you may be sure we were none too pleased when Red Jake arrived, and ran up a shack for himself just outside the town. He was neither congenial nor desirable; in fact, he was a "mean-white" of the worst order. He was a holy terror to the natives and soon began to terrorize the white population as well.

He was a great, big brute, six-feet-two high, as thick as an oak tree and as strong as an ox. He would stamp into the Thatched House, order drinks round and stop all business and gambling, while he was there. After two or three drinks he'd get most infernally offensive. We all tackled him in turn, but he just made mince-meat of us; which is saying a lot, for we were a pretty hard-bitten crowd.

After this state of things had lasted best part of two months a youngster turned up fresh from home, with an unspoiled complexion and the red of sappy British beef still showing in his cheeks. I fancy he'd got into some sort of bother at one of the universities, and had been sent abroad to save trouble. He was a fine, cleanly built lad, though not over big. His name was Mercer. He seemed to realize that he was new to our life, and would learn most from the overseas men by keeping a still tongue in his head and not asserting himself. Red Jake was away when he arrived and did not show up until he'd been settled in best part of a month.

One night when I was standing by the bar, talking to Mercer, Red Jake staggered in.

"Drinks on me," he shouts, then he catches sight of Mercer.

"Who the —— are you," he says.

"My name is Mercer," the boy replied.

"Oh, it is, is it?" says Jake, then turning to the barman he adds, "Bring a bottle for the baby, Joe."

"Can't get no bottles, Jake," says Joe nervously.

"Then bring him a glass of milk," Jake answered.

"I don't think I particularly want to drink with you," chips in young Mercer, looking his man up and down.

At that Jake flares up and turns to Joe.

"Bring the milk, and be —— sharp about it," he orders.

When it was brought he goes up close to Mercer.

"Are you going to drink this?" he says.

"No," answers the boy.

"Then I'll wash your face with it," says Jake; and, with that, he chucks the lot smack into Mercer's face.

Mercer didn't hesitate a minute. He hit out like a kicking mule and Jake went down with a crash. I was mighty sorry for the boy, for I'd seen Jake fight; but I might have saved my sympathy.

Jake got up and the Thatched House emptied into the street, for we wanted to see the fight.

Jake was in his shirt sleeves and didn't need to peel. Young Mercer stripped off his coat, and shirt too, and chucked them to me to hold. It was then we began to wonder if he'd got a sporting chance after all, for he stripped like a fighting man. His head was well set on, and his chest deeper than we had imagined. He was thin on the flanks, but his arm and shoulder muscles were what amazed us, for they rolled and rippled like steel springs under the smooth, white flesh, which had not yet been tanned by our African sun. Jake seemed to realize something of the same sort, for I saw him eyeing his opponent critically.

I wish I could do that fight justice, for it was the most beautiful exhibition of brains and skill against brute force I've ever seen.

Jake stood square on his huge legs. He looked like a monument, and you couldn't imagine him being knocked down. We knew from past experience that despite his weight he could move quickly enough when he wanted. He looked so much bigger than his opponent, however, and his massive, ugly face looked so menacing that I, for one, began to fear afresh for young Mercer. He, for his part, did not seem in the least anxious. Stripped to the waist, he stepped forward ready and looked toward the sergeant of police, who, for formality's sake, held a watch in the palm of his hand.

"Time!" called the sergeant.

Mercer faced his man with little weaving, intricate steps, breaking to left and right in a way which bespoke a previous knowledge of ring-craft. He was feeling his way, while Jake, with a watchful eye, pivoted slowly upon his right leg, his left arm partly extended, his right held low to guard the mark. This was different from his usual mad-bull, overbearing rush and showed that he appreciated something of his opponent's value.

Suddenly he rushed in, hitting with all his might; but each time Mercer was just beyond the range of the great fist, watching his man and waiting for an opening. Almost immediately after he led lightly with his left, and then led again, getting home each time; but there seemed to be no power behind the blows. Then it was "Time." Mercer was quite fresh, but Jake's great, hairy chest was laboring stormily.

Jake opened the second round with a sudden rush, but Mercer slipped sidewise and avoided him, then sprang in and delivered a stinging punch to the ribs which set Jake gasping for his breath. Elated by his slight success, the boy led for the face, but got a swinging counter on the jaw, which shook him sadly. Instantly Jake rushed in to complete his work, but Mercer, with his better knowledge of the art, kept out of harm's way until the end of the round.

As the boy rested upon my knee I offered him a sup from my flask, but he waved it aside.

"I may need it later," he said.

He was on his feet in a flash at the call of time and went straight for his man, his fist getting home with two clean smacks, one to the ribs and one flush between the eyes. That second punch would have fetched most men off their feet, but it didn't seem to do more than daze Jake for a second.

Mercer must have felt that he was winning then, for he mixed it up proper; but he got into a clinch with Jake, which was very nearly the end of him, for the big man smashed in a terrible uppercut which he only just broke with his guard. Jake tried another, Mercer dodged it; but got a swinging blow on the ear as he broke away.

Then it was time again. He came back to me with a bloody head, but still quite fit and able to take a lot more punishment.

For a couple of rounds more they fought guardedly, feeling for openings and not finding them. Jake's hitting was the harder, but the boy was quicker on his feet, and he had learned his lesson; and so kept out of another clinch. There was no cheering in those rounds; nothing but the quick patter of the men's feet, the thud of blows and the quick intake of hissing breath.

In the eighth round Mercer seemed to see an opening, for he leaped in like a leopard. There was a crack like a pistol shot; his head went back, his arms flew wide, and there he was on his back in the road, with his neck half-broken. Jake stepped forward with his right held ready, but half a dozen men dragged him back as the police sergeant began to count. At the count of five Mercer struggled to his knees, at seven he was on his feet. Jake rushed in, but the boy stumbled to the side, again and yet again, getting instinctively out of harm's way until the end of the round.

He sagged heavily on my knee that time, but just before the minute was up he snatched the flask from my hand and emptied it. Jake saw the action and grinned, but he did not feel the boy's body thrill and stiffen to the raw spirit as I did.

For two minutes they sparred cautiously, then Jake tried another of his mad rushes. That cost him the fight. Mercer had counted on it. As Jake closed in the boy's left shot out with all the weight of his body behind it. It was a beautiful blow, fair on the point of the scrubby, unshaven chin. Jake went down like a felled tree that the ax-men have wedged. He lay on his back, his chest rising and falling and his limbs twitching. He struggled spasmodically once or twice, but he couldn't rise and the sergeant counted him out.

——, how we cheered. Here was the great, hulking bully, who had terrorized us all, beaten by a boy barely out of his teens, whom he himself had called a baby not an hour ago.

JAKE went away after that. He was living pretty intricate with a native woman, named Usta, at the time, and we were mighty glad to see the last of him. Before he went he came into the Thatched House with his face all patched up and swore that he'd have Mercer's life before he'd finished; for, as I've said, he was a mean-white and couldn't take his licking like a man, although he'd brought the trouble on himself.

Shortly afterward Mercer took a farm eighty miles up country, after which we didn't see him more than about once in three months.

Months went by, and we didn't hear anything more of Red Jake. But he hadn't forgotten, he was only biding his time, and waiting for an opportunity to take his revenge.

One night when we were all sitting in the Thatched House playing a game of whisky poker which had been in progress best part of five weeks, we heard the beat of horses' hoofs, coming up the street from the Drift. I wasn't playing at the time, so went outside to see who it was. I got a pretty big surprize when I saw young Mercer roped and riding between two mounted policemen.

I asked what was the matter, and he told me he was under arrest on a charge of murdering a native woman. I asked the corporal of the escort for some more particulars, but he could only tell me that a man named Jake Jubert had laid an information at the police post, that a native woman had been burned to death on Mercer's farm, and that he would be willing to give evidence at the trial.

"Red Jake!" thinks I to myself. "This is the beginning of his revenge."

Next morning I went to see Mercer, who was locked up in a room adjoining the fort. He told me that he had been away when the woman, who was not one of his people, was burned, and had been on his way to inform the authorities when he had met the corporal and trooper of police, who had arrested him.

I knew that the assizes were not for another two months, and that morning I dug out for Mercer's place to find out what had happened.

All the "boys" were very frightened and at first would say nothing; but I did not need to bother for Mercer's Hottentot hunter, Mustard, had already got the story pieced together. I knew that I could rely upon his word, for he was mighty fond of his master, was Mustard.

"*Baas,*" he said, "the 'boys' are afraid to tell you the truth, because of the red *baas*, who came here after we had gone hunting, but me they have told."

"Well, and what have they told you?" I asked.

"Do you remember the woman, Usta, who went away with the red *baas*, after my *baas* had beaten him?" he asked.

I told him yes.

"Well," said he, "he caught her trying to run away with one of his *voorloers* and told her he would punish her for it. Then he brought her here and shut her in one of our huts, while we were away; that night he set fire to the hut and burned her to death. He beat the farm boys next morning with the *sjambok* and told them if they did not say my *baas* did it he would come back and kill them as well.

"I got this evidence corroborated by the farm boys and also the evidence of the boys who had been hunting with Mercer, and took it in to the Magistrate. After that Mercer was released.

I never saw a man so angry in my life.

"The dirty, white-livered swine," he said. "To think that after being beaten in a fair fight, brought about by a quarrel of his own making, he should try to get back at me this way. Think of it, he burned that woman out of sheer deviltry, and then tried to fix the murder on to me. I know that after the fight he swore to have my blood, but I thought that was only his overheated temper at the time. In any case, I expected that he'd try to get me fairly and at the risk of his own dirty hide."

The next day a police patrol was ordered out to hunt for Jake on a charge of murder. When the news reached us Mercer went straight to the fort and asked the police officer's permission to join in the hunt, but the official wouldn't hear of it.

Mercer came back to me cursing like a stevedore. Nothing would content him but he must set off on a private man-hunt of his own. I tried to dissuade him, but his mind was made up.

Seeing the sort of temper he was in, I decided to go along too to make sure that he did not get arrested on a second and better-founded charge of murder. There was a nasty, purposeful look in his eye which boded ill for Jake if we found him.

Just as we were starting out, a fine big Zulu who had been squatting on his heels in the road got up and stalked over majestically to where we were standing beside the horses.

Having given the usual form of greeting, he stood silent, waiting for one of us to speak. He was magnificently built, even for a Zulu, and looked like a big bronze statue standing there in the sun glare. A light dancing-shield was on his left arm and in his right hand he held a couple of throwing assagais and a knobkerrie. He wore a fringe of white buffalo tails below his right knee, and upon his head was the *keshler*, the black ring, which denotes manhood among the Zulu people.

"Well, what do you want?" I asked.

"*Baas*," he said, addressing Mercer, "you go to seek the Slaughterer"—"*Bulalio*" was the word he used.

"What is that to you?" asked Mercer.

"*Baas*," he replied, "I would go with you."

"Why?" asked Mercer.

"Because, *baas*, I am Umpomba, brother of Usta, whom Bulalio burned to death at your kraal."

"A valuable ally," said Mercer, in English, turning to me. "What do you think?'

"Take him by all means," I said. "He will find out far more from the natives than we can hope to do of where Red Jake is in hiding."

So Umpomba came with us. After we had been trekking best part of a week he brought the first definite news of the man we were after. Up to that time we had followed his trail by guesswork and hearsay.

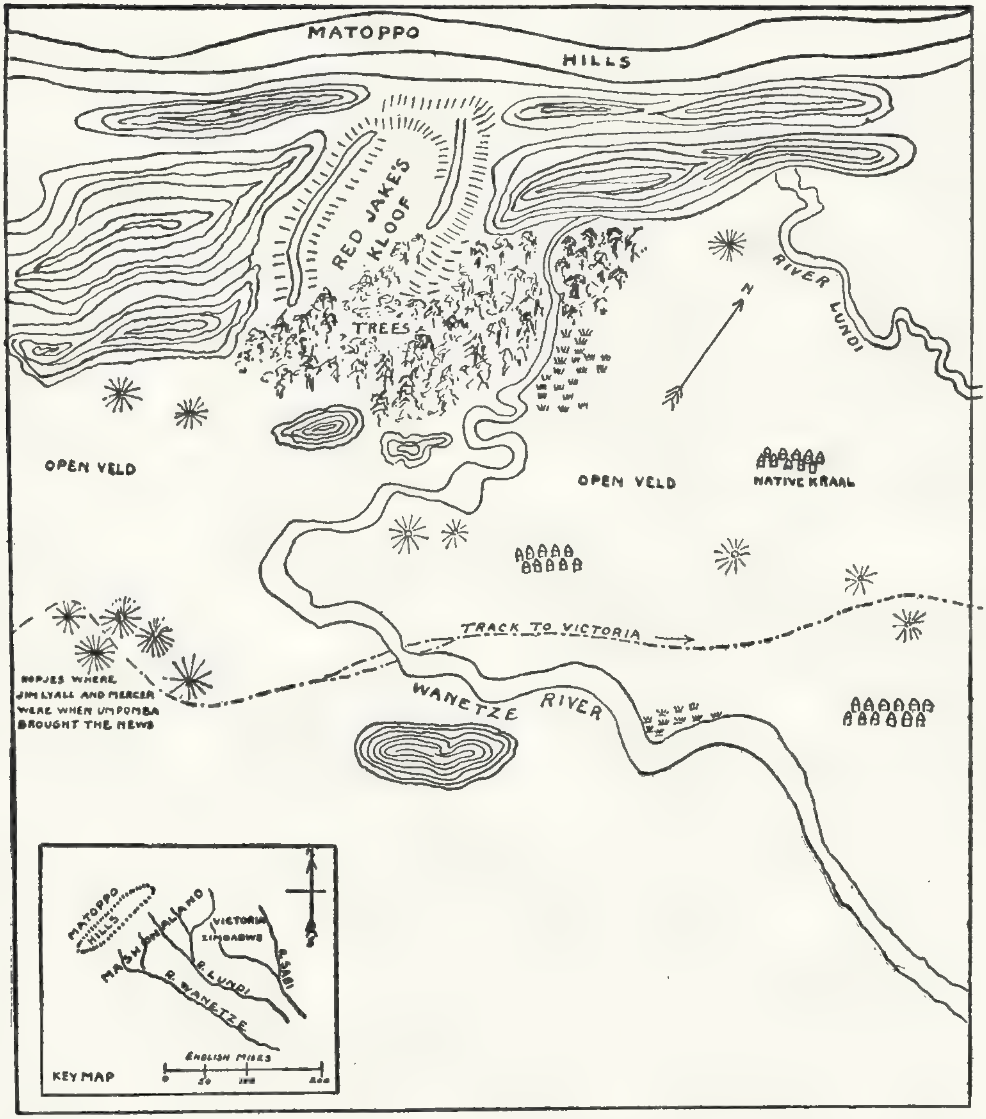
"*Baas*," said Umpomba, coming up to our camp-fire one night, "I have found Bulalio and have watched his hiding-place all through the heat of the day."

"Where is he, then?" asked Mercer eagerly.

"Not ten miles from here," came the unexpected answer. "There is a *kloof* in the hills by the big mountains. It is deep and very narrow at the entering in, so that half a dozen men might hold it easily against an *impi*. And," he added after a pause, during which he took snuff, "Bulalio has five other white men and some 'bad' natives with him now."

That information fairly staggered us, for we had expected to catch our quarry alone with a few native servants and *voorloopers*.

We stayed where we were among the kopjes for awhile after that. Umpomba used to go out every morning before dawn


MATOPPO
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OPEN VELD
OPEN VELD
NATIVE KRAAL
TRACK TO VICTORIA
KOPJES WHERE JIM LYALL AND MERCER WERE WHEN UMPOMBA BROUGHT THE NEWS
WANETZE RIVER
MATOPPO HILLS
MASHONALAND
VICTORIA
ZIMBABWE
R. LUNDI
R. WANETZE
R. SABI
ENGLISH MILES
0
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KEY MAP

and lay up in hiding during the day, watching the mouth of the *kloof*, where Red Jake and his friends were concealed. They didn't seem in a hurry to move on. That suited us very well, for we couldn't tackle the lot single-handed, and so had sent a boy back with a note to the police officer at Fort Victoria. We expected the police to arrive any time within a fortnight.

On the tenth day, when we were lying on our backs under the shade of a big ant heap, smoking our after-breakfast pipes, we heard some one approaching; sitting up, we saw old Umpomba, or rather young Umpomba, as he was then, running toward us on swiftly moving feet, as strong and almost as fleet as a buck.

"Baas," he cried as soon as he was within speaking distance, "they have all gone except Bulalio, and he is only waiting to pack the last of the gear."

We jumped to our feet and ran quickly back to camp, shouting to the "boys" to saddle our horses. In less than five minutes we were galloping —— for leather across the *veld*, Umpomba hanging on to my stirrup leather and running with long, untiring strides.

We dismounted about fifty yards from the *kloof*, approached quietly and, seeing no one, went in with a rush through the narrow opening. Red Jake heard us coming and, throwing up his revolver, fired twice as we came into view. I heard Umpomba gasp and, turning my head as I ran, saw him down on the ground with the blood flowing from a wound in his thigh. We were on to Jake before he could fire again. All three of us went down in a tearing, cursing, fighting, scratching bunch.

Then another man, whom Umpomba evidently had not seen, must have run out from one of the huts, for I got a kick in the ribs which made me fairly gasp. I rolled clear of Mercer and Jake and sprang to my feet facing this new antagonist. He was a short, thick-set fellow, strongly built and with terribly long arms. He held a knife in his right hand, but, luckily for me, had forgotten his gun in his anxiety to see what all the row was about.

He came at me with a rush, but I'd dealt with knife-armed toughs before that day. As he threw back his arm to strike I kicked upward with all my might and caught him fairly on the elbow with the toe of my boot, so that the knife flew from his paralyzed fingers. Then we closed.

Gad, but that was a fight. This way and that we tugged and struggled, but neither of us could make much headway with the other, and all the time I could hear Mercer and Red Jake snarling, struggling and cursing on the ground. I felt the sweat soaking through my clothing and running down from under my hat into my eyes.

If the natives who were standing round watching had liked to lend a hand they could have finished us quick enough, but I fancy the treatment they had received from Red Jake and his mates hadn't made them any too anxious to interfere.

We should have stood there and struggled until the Day of Judgment, I believe, if my foot hadn't hit against a stone. I felt the rock turn under my boot and down I went with my opponent on top of me. As we lay on the ground hugging each other, he suddenly loosened his hold and reached out over my shoulder. Next time I saw his hand it held the rock that had tripped me. He held it high for a second and then bashed it down onto the side of my head.

I didn't know anything else after that till I woke up to find Mercer splashing water in my face. Jake, looking pretty sick and shaky, was roped to a tree-trunk close by. Umpomba, who had managed to crawl up, was covering the hole in his leg with one hand and keeping the natives still with Mercer's revolver, which he held in the other.

Mercer didn't mean letting those boys go. He wanted them as evidence at Red Jake's trial.

As soon as I was fit to sit up Mercer went off and fetched the horses. I rode one and Umpomba the other. Mercer drove the natives before him with his revolver held ready. Jake was roped to my stirrup.

We didn't lose any time in setting out, for we didn't want my antagonist, who had got away, to find us there when he got back with his pals.

A fortnight later we reached Victoria. There was a pretty big celebration in the "Thatched House" that night after Jake and his boys were safely jugged.

Next morning Jake was brought before the magistrate, who committed him to the assizes, which were to be held a fortnight later.

EVERY one living within a thirty-five-mile radius was liable for jury service and every one was already summoned. It wouldn't have made any difference whether they were summoned or not, they'd all have been there, just the same; for, apart from the fact that a murder trial was not by any means a usual occurrence with us, the assizes were our annual festival when the twenty-odd traders, farmers and transport riders came into town from the outlying stations for a great reunion. I think I told you that we did things collectively in Victoria in those days?

The judge, who came down for the assizes, used to complain that he couldn't sleep for the noise; you can't wonder at that, because his room was in a sort of addition to the Thatched House. But he was the only man in the town who wanted to go to bed, so it didn't much matter.

On the afternoon before the trial half a dozen strangers rode into the town. Rough-looking customers they were, but they didn't make any trouble and kept sober through the evening—which was more than we expected of them. In fact, their very quietness and moderation made me uneasy.

Next morning the little room which did duty as a court-house was packed to suffocation, and I saw the six strangers scattered among the crowd. I remember thinking it funny that they had not stuck together. Two of them were posted on either side of the pathway through which the prisoner would be brought presently.

The judge came in and took his seat. Then they brought in Red Jake. His face was sullen and hopeless as he passed through the door; but I saw his eyes light up as he looked round the crowded room. As they led him in it seemed to me, who was standing near, that one of the strangers leaned forward and slipped something into Jake's pocket.

It took the best part of the morning to wade through the evidence, which was all given by natives. Jake's only defense was a complete denial of everything.

Then the judge summed up. He pointed out the motive of the crime, that of double revenge; first, against Mercer, and, secondly, against the girl Usta, for wishing to return to a man of her own color. He pointed out the brutal nature of the murder, and, altogether, it seemed a clear case of Jake for the long drop.

As the judge finished speaking I looked up and saw Umpomba, with his head half through the window, listening to every word.

The jury didn't need to retire to consider their verdict. For a minute or two they conferred together in whispers. The foreman was on his feet.

"My Lord—" he began, then stopped dead.

You could have heard a pin drop in the court-house, for each of those six strangers had a brace of revolvers in his fists, and Red Jake also held a gun in his hand. I had not been wrong about the stranger by the door slipping something into the prisoner's pocket.

"See here," said Jake, leaning forward and glaring fiercely at the foreman, "You find me 'not guilty,' else me, an' my pals will blow particler —— outer this community."

The judge half-rose from his seat and Jake's pistol swung round to cover him.

"Sit down," he yapped, and the judge sank back. Gad, but he was a brave man, that judge.

"You will gain nothing by this show of armed force," he said. "I shall do my duty and pass sentence in accordance with the finding, whatever happens after." Then he turned to the jury. "Gentlemen," he said. "I am waiting for your finding."

I saw the foreman look furtively around him as if seeking a way of escape. Seeing none, he hesitated a moment longer, looking appealingly at his fellow jurymen.

"Not guilty," he stammered, at last, flushing up to the roots of his sandy hair as the words left his lips.

It was a day of unexpected happenings, but things weren't finished yet.

Umpomba thrust his head and shoulders right in through the window.

"White men," he shouted, "you would let go the Red Slaughterer, who burned my sister? Then for Usta's—my sister's—sake, I swear by the Inkoosizana-y-Zulu, the Mother of the Heavens, to be revenged; aye, even if I have to wait a lifetime."

Then the strangers surged forward and surrounded Jake, before they all backed out of the door together, the muzzles of their revolvers covering us all the time. A moment later we heard their horses' hoofs upon the road and almost immediately after that a mighty splashing, as they dashed through the drift.

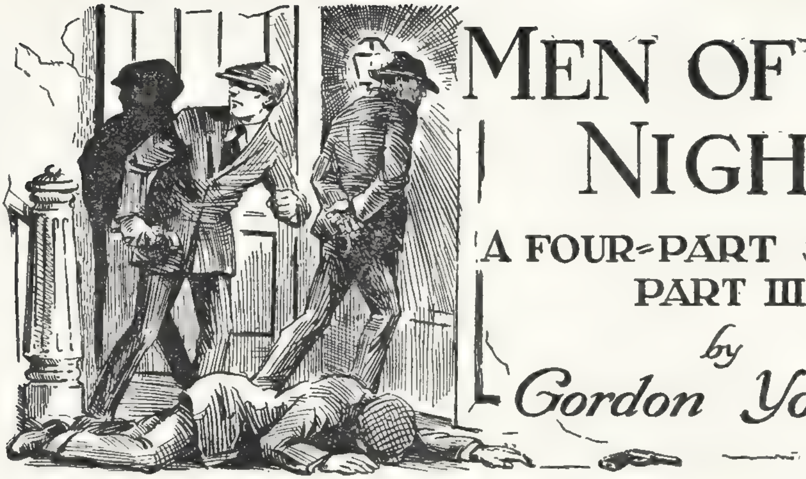
III

LYALL slowly scraped out the bowl of his pipe and spat contemplatively upon the floor.

"Jake hated for no reason at all," he said, "and failed to get his revenge. Old Umpomba was a good hater, in a just cause, and has fulfilled his vow after thirty years. But what always beat me was why Jake was never recaptured and hanged after a fresh trial."

"I can tell you that," said the bank manager. "It is a point of English law, which would have been in force in Mashonaland in those days, that a man, once tried for an offense and acquitted, can not be tried again for the same offense, not even though he publicly confess his guilt."

"Ah!" said the prospector reflectively. "Civilized law's a rum thing. Personally I prefer the law of the wild—old Umpomba's brand, for instance."



MEN OF THE NIGHT

A FOUR-PART STORY

PART III

by

Gordon Young

Author of "Bucking Fate," "Bluffed," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

MRS. HELENA HOLDER LOUDEN, sister of Frank Holder, whose millions had been made in Texas oil, was giving a house-party; one of her many attempts to "break into" fashionable New York Society.

One of the entertainers, a girl named Javotte, had attracted attention by her black-masked face and clever dancing. Although many speculated as to her identity only Frank Holder knew. He had found her in some cheap cabaret and had fallen in love with her.

That night when Javotte went to her room she found a masked man concealed there who robbed her of her jewels. He warned her not to marry Holder, and Javotte was in terror lest her past life had been discovered.

"P'ease, p'ease tell me who you are," she begged in broken English; but the man refused to raise his mask.

While they talked screams sounded through the hall; another woman had discovered the loss of her jewels. Quick as light, the masked man slipped from the room and was gone. The crack of a revolver sounded as he shot out the lights, warning the guests to stay in their rooms.

Holder, thinking only of Javotte, hurried to her room and then brought her secretly to a tower chamber where she would be safe until he and a private detective could get her away next night.

During the day the black-masked man obtained admittance to Javotte's room and revealed his identity as "Black Wolf," a notorious character of the underworld.

Javotte, who feared he would betray her forced marriage to a gangster, promised to help him escape that night.

It was dark, without moonlight; and together they slipped down-stairs after the detective to the car which was to take Holder and the girl to the city.

With infinite quiet Black Wolf overpowered and bound the detective; then when Holder appeared he had already taken his place as chauffeur.

Followed a mad ride through the night while Javotte, hysterical with fear, told Holder that the driver was Black Wolf.

The car drew up at a lonely spot, and the masked man opened the door.

"It's a good place for a murder," he murmured.

"But we'll postpone it," he continued.

He had seen the look of sheer terror on Javotte's face.

"She really loves him," he thought; "and if so, why——"

Holder seemed as impassive as ever. He revived Javotte by fanning her slowly with a newspaper in which was an account of the murder of Javotte's gangster husband. Finally it caught Javotte's eye, and she became radiant. Holder had been trying to make her see it for ten minutes. With a corps of detectives in his pay he knew far more than any one suspected.

WHEN Javotte married Holder it was a subject for discussion in underworld circles as well as in those more fashionable. Billy the Dude and Jerry Peete, two of Black Wolf's devotees, sat in the latter's apartment and speculated as to how the affair would affect their chief. While they waited for him to come back they were startled by the peremptory entrance of a haughty young woman, who ignored them and proceeded to make herself perfectly at home. She informed them that her name was Leela—which was sufficient to identify her at once as an important member of the "lawless set."

Meanwhile Middleton, returning from a successful robbery, was nearly made the victim of a gang battle; but the vigilance of Silkeen Harry, his chauffeur, saved him. He hurried on to his rooms and was surprized at seeing his unexpected guests. As he entered Leela started visibly and exclaimed—

"Black Wolf!"

Presently the two men left him to talk alone with her.

"I came to warn you," asserted the young woman. She went on to tell him that his life was in imminent danger. For a moment she forgot to pursue the subject and suddenly surrendered herself to a shameless display of her more tender feelings for him. Middleton looked bored. Bitterly, then, she resumed her warning and intimated that her own hand might be in the matter. With that she flounced off in the company of Billy the Dude. Black Wolf began making preparations for the next big "job."

One midnight a gray limousine drew up before a house in New York's exclusive residence quarter. Middleton and Silkeen Harry got out and approached the home of Frank Holder. Billy the Dude was already on the inside, and Silkeen caught his attention by tossing a pea against one of the windows.

"Them parties got somet'in' on," said Billy when he joined them. "An' dey don't want nobody to get hep."

Black Wolf fastened a black silk mask over his face. "I'm going up," he said.

XIV

MIDDLETON moved with velvet footsteps, outreaching like a blind man but with no uncertainty—just caution. Only a dull glow came from the searchlight because of a folded handkerchief over the glass. It gave him the light he needed without the glare that might attract attention.

Going into a house where people are known to be up, requires a cool head and a steady foot, also much patience. Oddly enough law-abiding people never seem to think that crooks are just about as nervous and tense as they would be if they went into night work.

Middleton went through a hallway to the front of the house and started up the wide stairway, counting noiselessly to himself—

"One—two—three—four——"

He carefully missed the next step. Then—

"—six——"

His foot passed up to the eighth step.

It was likely that the alarm was not set; or it may have been that the mysterious party who had passed up ahead of him also knew which steps to avoid.

The house was quiet with the dismal silence that bears down like a weight. At that moment he was more interested in being an eavesdropper than a thief.

He stood for a time in the dark upper hall, listening.

Not a sound, though he could see a trace of light filtering between and under the heavily draped double doorway of the library.

He should, he felt, have been able to hear the hum of even low voices and wondered if something had startled them into silence.

Gently, on his toes, he moved nearer and nearer toward the doorway; and he heard nothing, not a movement.

He put an eye to the edge of a portière, pulled it slightly aside and peered through.

The library was a large room. It was a library because the architect who had originally designed the house put it in for about the same reason that tailors put buttons on sleeves. No rich man's house is complete without a library, and no man is well dressed without some buttons on his sleeves. Men who can sleep in the presence of any book that ever lay open upon their knees must have the library, and usually perpetuate the literary tradition by using it for a smoking-room. When Holder bought the house he got the library.

It was a very large room, lined with bookcases on two sides. In the center of the room a long, broad table spread itself as a sort of pedestal for a bronze maiden who towered in artistic nakedness, holding a cluster of shaded lights in her upstretched hands.

To Middleton's eyes, accustomed to darkness, the dim light was clear enough, though at first he could not make out what he saw.

A little cabinet of books had been moved away from the wall, revealing the face of a safe. He had not known of this safe. It had been one thing the artful Dolly had not learned about; but he knew a great deal about safes, and about the clever devices used by rich people to keep them from the eyes of burglars.

The little cabinet was constructed to swing easily away from the wall; and when in place no one would have been likely to suspect that it was merely a mask for a big fire-proof treasure-box.

Safes are fire-proof all right; but one hasn't yet been made which of itself can beat off a competent cracksman. Every safe must be supplemented with alarms and watchmen before it will do all that its manufacturers claim for it. The best that can be done is to hide the safe from the burglar; so in the making of safes for rich men's homes the tendency is toward subtlety rather than strength.

Middleton might appropriately have felt aggrieved, for there was in Mrs. Holder's room a rather ornately disguised little safe which he knew all about and intended to visit. Here was the larger and more important treasure-box.

A woman was crouching before it and the man stood beside her and tilted a slender wrought-iron reading-light for her.

She was on her knees and one hand was pressed against her face meditatively. The other dropped from the knob as she stared, baffled.

"Can't you do it?" the man demanded in a suspicious whine.

She did not answer.

"You're trickin' me. I'll get even," he threatened vaguely, querulously.

She looked up at him in a way more suggestive of contempt than alarm and said—

"Ah, you talk beeg while Cabron he is in prison."

"Just let me tell you——"

"Bah! There is nothing you can tell to me. You make so many lies yourself you do not know what is truth."

He made his voice as ugly as he could, with the cultivated sneer and harshness of the woman-bully:

"You'd better get inside that safe, an' quick. I'll put *you* on the rocks, right! You don't dare give me no double-cross."

"I dare what I p'ease. Eet is not for you. Eet is for my husband I would do this——"

She gestured helplessly toward the safe.

The man laughed contemptuously.

"A fine fathead of a husband!"

In a flash she was on her feet; a hand swept out, the blow of palm on cheek made a startling smack in the big room.

"—— you!" the fellow cried, stumbling back.

He kept his hold on the light-stand. He did not seem greatly surprized or even angered.

"I can ruin you," he snarled viciously.

"An' I can have you keeled!"

"If you do——"

"I would be happy an' not have one tear!"

She stood defiantly, chin up, glaring at him.

He straightened the light-stand, and, moving closer, with an air of pleading said:

"Aw, Javotte, we can't fuss. Give me enough jewels or whatever you have. I'll go away. On the level. I promise. I do what I promise. You know that——"

"Pa-ah!"

"But listen. If you——"

"Your hands away! Do not touch me!"

"But listen, dear. You're makin' a bonehead play. I'm your friend. You know that. You take care o' me and I'll take care of you!"

"Oh——"

She lifted her little hands almost claw-like as if to tear him apart.

"Oh-o-o, I want to say, '—— *you';* an', God help me, I mean eet!"

"That don't worry me none. You got to take care o' me."

"Eet is not you, not me, I care about. Eet is somebody who love me much."

"Aw, can the bunk, Javotte. You told me to come tonight—now what you goin' do for me?"

"I am a fool," said Javotte reflectively.

The man laughed. He was not amused. He just laughed because he had nothing else to answer.

"I tol' you to come, but——"

She gestured helplessly, looking toward the safe.

"I work my head to remember what eet is you do."

She shook her head, baffled.

"You mus' wait till there is another time."

Then, looking directly at him, frankly but as if thinking aloud—

"I wish I could keel you——"

"But you won't," he said with energy that did not conceal his uneasiness.

"No. Nev-ar. I jus' pray somebody else do eet."

He hurried off that subject, and asked with an injured manner—

"What you going to do about it?"

His gesture indicated the safe, locked tight as a miser's fist.

"I do not know. Sometime I learn eet, then——"

She threw out her hand in a gesture of indifferent generosity.

"But what do you think I'm goin' do in the meantime? Starve?"

"Eet would make me happy so," she answered quickly.

The man seemed not to have heard. He had something of his own to say, and was preoccupiedly forming the sentence in his thoughts.

He was a person of no distinctive qualities at all in appearance; rather good-looking in the commonplace way that most men of thirty-one or two are good-looking if they have not hunched their shoulders under burdens nor had their hands spoiled by earning a living. True, his was the cheap sporting type of face and dress; his complexion was dark, suggestive of Latin parentage; his upper lip was stained by a faint mustache that he touched caressingly from time to time.

"You know," he began with a dramatic drawl, a sort of cat-with-a-mouse manner, "I believe *somebody* would be glad to pay for what I can tell."

She answered fiercely:

"Jus' once you try eet! Cabron he will find you next time."

"He'll stay where he is for some time yet."

"But when Cabron moves a finger, jus' one leetle finger—what happen, eh?"

She was frightening him with a name of which she herself was afraid, but as long as he didn't know that, nothing was lost in the effect that she was after.

"Well, let's talk business," said the fellow with an uneasiness that he could not hide. "What am I goin' do if you don't come through?"

"Trus' me."

"Trust the ——!"

"Eet is the same. Sure."

"Say, don't try to make a joke."

He spoke with what he thought was an air of firmness.

"I'm not to be trifled with. I don't want—" this with a manner of great consideration—"to be hanging around you all the time trying to get enough to live on. Just give me a good stake, an' I'll beat it."

"Yees, anything—ever'thing to be rid of you. But I can not open heem."

As she half-ragefully drew out the word she snatched at the glittering knob and jerked as if to pull the heavy steel door open, tearing its bolts and locks apart.

IT WAS then that the man jumped as if shot, and she whirled. Both stood in a frozen attitude of amazement; for the curtains had parted, a tall, masked figure was in the room and his pleasant voice, significantly ironical, had said—

"Perhaps I can be of assistance."

Javotte mumbled something like an involuntary prayer in a foreign tongue, and her knees weakened so that for a moment she was unsteady. Here again was the dread Black Wolf.

The man swore, then flashed a revolver.

"Hands up!" he cried.

Middleton's hands were empty; but he answered carelessly:

"No, my friend, it is not 'Hands up.' I can not open a child's bank with my hands up. And your gun—kindly point it at the floor. From the way your hand wabbles I see you are not used to playing with firearms."

"Who are you?"

"A gentleman of the night, professionally."

"Take off that mask. Let me get a good look at you. Take it off, I said."

Middleton's right hand had slipped into his side coat-pocket with an unhurried movement that did not attract attention until the bulge of the pocket as he thrust it forward gave the convincing appearance of a revolver's nose being pressed against the cloth. It was only his forefinger, but it was enough.

"I heard you."

There was an ominous softness in the answer.

"Yes. I heard you. But if I take off the little visor I am wearing it will be necessary for me to shoot——"

He waggled the right-hand coat-pocket slightly by way of emphasis.

"Do you care to have me remove it?"

The quiet manner of asking was a threat. His voice was smooth and dangerous, polite.

The man gave his answer by his attitude, not with words of submission. He lowered his gun and stared, jaw loose, and very much afraid of the poised figure.

The sense of fear that some people are able to inspire in others, in any others, is in the menace of personality. Dangerous men often do not convey the feeling that they are dangerous; and weaklings kill to keep from being thought cowards; some who bully, rave, threaten, inspire much the same sort of dread as lunatics; but it is poise, the calmness of mastery, that decides when two men are face to face which is to be obeyed.

Middleton said to him politely, words shaded with contempt:

"There is nothing to be frightened about. This safe—I can open it."

To Javotte—

"With your permission, may I?"

Javotte was trying to breathe slowly. Her little hands were cramped into fists, and she seemed scarcely to dare trust herself with an answer. She was afraid. She was also angered. It seemed maliciously exasperating that there was no escape from this Black Wolf. She recognized him by the subtle, mocking overtones, the half-bored graciousness of his manner.

At this moment she remembered with a great, choking leap of her heart that he had warned her almost threateningly not to marry Holder; and she wished greatly that she had not.

"I am sure," Middleton went on with just the suggestion of a bow as he faintly gestured toward the man, "that your—ah—your—friend and I can arrange a division of its contents amicably."

No answer from either of them.

Javotte was suffering torture. She would probably have given her slim fingers to be crushed, burned, anything, rather than endure what she was into.

Her face was very pale. The blood had left it, frightened away by the black mask; and she was rigid, strained, as if evoking a great resolution.

Middleton took a step closer to the safe.

"A Bromley," he said. "Easy to open, these Bromleys. Twenty minutes."

To the man—

"You can be patient for twenty minutes?"

No answer.

Middleton looked down at the safe's knob, and from a corner of his eye glanced at the gun in the fellow's hand.

"Yes."

Middleton stepped to the safe.

"In fifteen, if I am not disturbed."

He laid his long, delicate fingers on the bright knob and bent down crouchingly.

She sprang at him frantically, pushing at him, trying to force him away, and cried with low anguish:

"No—no—no! It mus' not be. No! Nevare!"

The man bent forward, his mouth twisted into a snarl, the gun set at his hip, muzzle on, and said:

"Then you were stringin' me? You didn't try to open it?"

"I did, I did hones' try; but now——"

Middleton reached out, snatched the man's gun hand, swinging it up under his arm and wrenching the automatic free.

"You dirty crook, I'll——"

The man checked himself. He had spoken without thinking and without courage; just blurted the words because abuse was ever at his tongue's end.

"Yes?" Middleton inquired indifferently, waiting.

It was his incomprehensible air of assurance, of being so utterly at ease, together with Javotte's protest, that must have made the fellow feel he was being double-crossed. Anyway something made him feel it, for he cried:

"She's framed this, an' you're in on it. It's a play. But I don't fall. No, by ——! I get mine or tell the world she is my wife!"

Javotte made a low, moaning sound of rage and protest and settled weakly against the wall.

"Why of course, Burillo. I knew that," Middleton answered.

"Oh!"

Javotte sprang forward.

"I did not know—I did not know, hones'!"

Her face was turned to Middleton. She was appealing to him as to one who had the right to judge. "He was hide away an' tell ever'body he was dead. I did not know. Eet was in the papers. I would give anything to have heem go away—for ever! But—" she turned on Burillo— "you go tell the world. Tell ever'body! My husband love an' trus' me. I do not want heem hurt, but I will give nothing—nothing!"

Again she appealed to Middleton:

"He hide for fear Cabron keel him. I think eet true that he is dead. Some man is keel an' he—" the gesture that indicated Burillo was dramatically contemptuous—"put his letters an' book in the dead man's pocket so ever'body think eet is heem!"

The masked face turned on Burillo. Unarmed, cornered, exposed, he was greatly afraid and seemed almost trying to huddle himself into an inconspicuous object.

"Somebody'll pay for this," he whined.

"The devil," said Middleton without amusement. "You'll find him a good paymaster."

Pause, and the eyes within the mask scrutinized Burillo with a steadiness that seemed to make the marrow melt in his bones.

"Do you know—" Middleton was speaking quietly— "I think I shall have to take you under my wing for a while; and—" his voice was gentle and smooth, sardonically caressing— "the next report of your death will probably not be wholly unfounded."

"Say," he cried, snapped up into action by his sense of great danger, and almost holding out his hands, "you've got this wrong! Don't believe her! She knew I was not dead—but she promised to give me mine when she married Holder!"

Javotte gasped:

"Oh, a lie! That is one beeg lie! Oh!"

"You're the liar!" Burillo cried, thrusting out a clenched fist.

Javotte was like a tigress hesitating to attack. Her sharp little teeth were bare, and claw-like fingers hovered at her side. Her breath was sharp as a hiss.

Then something like the peck of a finger began to strike against the window-pane.

Tick—click—click—click, over and over, one after another.

Middleton knew it for the signal of danger, big danger.

A shower of dried peas hit the window. Then no more.

Javotte and Burillo looked wonderingly about the room, toward Middleton, again about the room.

Middleton waited. There was nothing else to do.

In the motionless silence they heard the door of an auto slam shut; and a moment later the street door closed.

"Oh, Santa Maria! Mr. Holder! He did not stay on the trip like he say. Oh I am sorry for heem, for he love me! I can do nothing—eet is over!"

She had whispered it tensely, then sank weakly against the face of the safe, helpless, resigned.

In the next three or four seconds of silence Middleton had looked from her to Burillo and back again; and he had no doubt at all as to Javotte's honesty.

Holder's slow, heavy feet had scarcely started up the stairs before Middleton gave her an urgent push as he whispered:

"Get out of bed and pretend to hear burglars! Quick! Get into a nightdress. Quick!"

The force of his urgency more than her own desire moved her. She gave him a second's dazed look, her lips parted in puzzled wonder; then, understanding, vanished.

"You—put a handkerchief on your face. Quick. There by the doorway and be quiet."

Burillo, not realizing why or what was up, did as he was told.

Holder, heavy on his feet, puffing a little, came slowly along the hall to see what a light was doing in his library that time of night. If he thought of burglars the thought did not disturb him. He did not rouse up a servant or try to use caution.

With a slow, tired gesture he pushed aside the portières and faced Middleton, who stood waiting for him.

"Good evening," said Middleton, masked but gracious.

"Un-n," said Holder; or rather he grunted as if jarred slightly, and stared at Middleton, then at the burglar in the white handkerchief.

He was not sloppily fat, but massive, unwieldy. He was big-bodied, with a big head, big features and steady eyes. In appearance there was nothing combative about him; but he seemed solid, unmovable.

"I know you are sorry to have interrupted us," said Middleton. "Won't you sit down? We were getting ready to begin. Oh, yes—" he noticed Holder's glance toward his empty hands— "we are armed. But I didn't want to startle you. There are those who serve under the Black Mask that never give a thought to their patrons' nerves. I believe it is such thoughtlessness that has largely prejudiced the public against our profession."

"Un-n," Holder repeated impassively, heavily turning his head from the white-masked one to the black mask. Then—

"Middleton, how in —— did you know where that safe was?"

He pointed toward the Bromley's face, exposed by the cabinet that had been swung from against the wall.

MIDDLETON had stood up without a quiver under various surprizes and shocks, but he had never got one that really jarred him any more than that. Holder was so completely casual about it, as if it were of no importance to have recognized him.

"Who?" said Middleton. "I didn't quite catch the name."

Holder grunted at him, unimpressed, then gestured again toward the safe. There was something demanding, almost commanding, in the gesture.

"Oh," Middleton answered pleasantly. "There are many ways of learning the secrets of our patrons. It is possible, you know, to buy plans from architects' clerks. And when we find a house that has been fitted with such excellent burglar alarms as yours, why we know right away that there must be something in that house worth going after."

"Something in that, too," said Holder heavily, as impersonally as if it were not his house that was being robbed.

"Boy, move a chair before the safe for Mr. Holder. You are entitled to be comfortable anyway."

Burillo did push up a chair. Holder walked heavily to it and sat down. He did not show any concern at all, but appeared at ease.

Middleton looked at him keenly, and remembered that there were people who thought of Holder as a soulless lump of half-moistened clay, a fellow more or less born rich, as an oyster is born to its shell and scarcely of more human worth, a big, dull fellow, sluggishly concerned with food, sleep, and a big chair where he could idly watch people.

But at that moment Middleton saw him heavy with an air of calm solidity. He seemed to have repose. There was undeniable intelligence in his deep eyes. Neither regret for what he was about to lose nor alarm for what might happen touched him. He actually looked more interested than anything else, sitting there motionless, his bulky body filling the big chair as molten metal fills a mold.

Middleton put his hand to the knob and leaned forward listening, but listening through the tips of his delicate fingers and tense to catch the infinitesimal jar of the falling tumblers.

Then a woman's voice:

"Oh, why—Frank! I—I— What is so much the matter?"

The three men turned their heads as with one movement.

Javotte was bloodless, frightened and distressed; she stood there in slippers and silken dressing-gown with an arm bare above the elbow as it reached up along the curtains she had parted.

"I thought I heard— Oh, Frank, what these men do here?"

Middleton glanced at Holder. Their strained little farce was for him. He was both the audience and a player in it; but also alert and penetrating. His face seemed too unemotional to show anything.

He struggled up out of the chair, moving awkwardly but with an unexpected rapidity, and went toward Javotte, who approached with fright on her face. She was playing a hypocrite's rôle, but the fear was genuine, intense, choking.

Holder put out one of his big, heavy arms and she fell against it as against a limb of a tree. Always he spoke as if with effort, and he seemed to forget there were burglars in the room as he said—

"Came back—un—hurried—to get back home."

"Oh I am—am—so—*glad!*"

She told the lie, if it was a lie, with difficulty. "But these——"

"Un-n."

He looked around, solidly, heavily.

"Burglars."

It was as if he had been meeting burglars in his home every evening or so.

Middleton, behind his mask, was smiling with amusement and something more than amusement. He wondered a little sardonically just how much they were deceiving this fellow, if at all. He realized definitely that Holder himself was about the most deceptive person imaginable.

"Un. My dear—" the heavy arm was still supporting her— "they won't hurt anything. We'll just let 'em alone. You go back to bed."

She looked toward Middleton and begged for mercy with her eyes.

"Pardon me," said Middleton with his exasperating air of gentleness that had a wire edge of irony on it, "but I believe it would be better if Mrs. Holder remained. She might be tempted to use the telephone."

"Un-n," said Holder thoughtfully.

Then as if he had decided on what to do, he looked right at Middleton: "You fellows hurry—un-n—hurry—get out. The combination is—un—is—un-n——"

After a moment's puzzlement he gave up the effort to remember and reached clumsily in his vest pocket for a note-book.

"No—no—no!" Javotte whispered protestingly, pulling at his arm.

She might as well have pulled at an oak bough.

"Un—yes, dear. Quickest way. Un-nh; let 'em get out."

Each word dropped heavily as a piece of water-soaked wood. He fumbled with clumsy, not nervous, fingers at the little book, then read slowly, without inflection, like a child spelling from a copy-book.

With quick, sure, expert touches Middleton followed the combination until the lugs loosened, and the door safe swung open with a noiseless, ponderous movement.

Javotte sobbed, but she was not crying. She was almost choked.

The inner compartments were not locked. Holder had never expected them to be reached. Professionally they would not have detained Middleton very long, for he knew more about safes than the men that made them.

Holder said heavily, with a touch of impatience:

"Get through. Get through."

Rarely was ever a safe plundered under more conflicting circumstances. The owner directed the looting, and had no selfish motive in getting himself robbed. Middleton felt almost reluctant to dip into the loot.

"That drawer—un—left—top—most you want is there," Holder directed with slow dropping of words, no different in tone or manner from that of showing a stenographer where to find papers of no particular importance.

Middleton withdrew the drawer. His hand stirred among the boxes there and at a glance he knew a fortune in jewelry was before him. Holder, with the fond weakness that even philosophers have, had most lavishly gathered ornaments for the woman he loved. But if he had bought them like a lover he could lose them like a philosopher.

"More—more in drawer above. Rings, or something. I forget. Un-n—oh, get through."

Middleton reached out and placed the withdrawn drawer on the table and turned again to the safe.

"Go through it—satisfy yourself. 'N' get out. Some bonds down there. Take 'em if you want. Un-n—registered though. Be careful. Get caught sellin' 'em. Un-n. Take 'em if you want. You see, Middleton, I'm squaring my debt. Un-n. That stuff on Cabron was a big help."

Middleton jerked his face to stare directly into the big, impassive countenance. This was almost too much.

And as he looked hard at him, Middleton sensed something of the power that was in the man. He was subtle and strong too; under that fleshly mask was an altogether different sort of person from what the world suspected—the person Javotte had discovered and really loved.

Middleton lived by a cruel and remorseless code. He, like Drount, like Silkeen, like all crooks, had a couple of spots of honor that he lived by; but he had no tenderness toward victims.

Every criminal feels something very much like contempt for the victim; it is as if the very inability to keep from being victimized made the person unworthy of sympathy. Savages in warfare put captives to death with much the same feeling. But Holder was impassive as an honest man paying a debt; which indeed he seemed to feel that he was doing.

Abruptly something attracted Middleton's attention. He looked around quickly. The portières were stirring. Burillo was gone. Also the drawer of jewels. The pad of his running feet could be heard on the stairs.

Holder chuckled heavily. His thick, heavy lips moved a little toward a smile as he watched Middleton.

Javotte put her hands to her throat as if holding back a groan.

Said Holder:

"—— little honor—'mong thieves. Unh? That's what I tell my brokers. Sorry for you, Middleton. Un-nh."

Middleton made a slight gesture of indifference and answered quietly:

"True, very true. After this I want references from my fellow burglars. You'll pardon me; I must go after that fellow. These—this safe—some other evening. Thank you for your—ah—courtesy."

He spoke with unhurried, quiet irony, and bowed himself from the room.

The strain was over. Javotte crumpled and hung limply, almost unconscious in the big arms of the unlovely, tender man.

"Little girl, it's all right. Don't—plenty more. I hurried back. Got word—vague—may not be anything to it—got word Cabron will escape. Detective wired. Why—oh——"

Javotte had fainted.

Down the street, a half-block away, in the shadows a man lay groaning. Though he had fled, run, a noiseless, panther-like bound had put a lean shape before him; and the chilling words, "Han's up!" gave him such a start that he jumped, partly from terror and largely because he was hugging the wealth of a prince against his breast.

It is dangerous, almost deadly, to make sudden, unexpected moves before the face of a highwayman, or at least of one that knows his business; and Silkeen's automatic fell like a blackjack alongside of the fellow's head.

Silkeen was quick as any animal, and his instinct was faster than thought; his cruelty so complete as to be unconscious.

With the rapid, sensitive, searching movements of one who has gone through pockets when seconds counted like hours in his life, the half-dead man was ransacked from armpits to the top of his socks—there are so many little ways that cunning people try to outwit the highwayman—and everything movable on him was carried off.

"Hope dat guy don't croak," said Silkeen to his friend Billy the Dude as they sat together over a bottle of beer in Silkeen's kitchen, while Jerry sliced cold meat and bread. " 'Cause maybe he'd like ter know how it feels t' be cleaned *right!*"

XV

SILKEEN'S apartment was not far from the Wellington-Dane and conveniently near the garage where many of the cars in the neighborhood were kept. He spent much of his time in the apartment, scarcely ever stirring out except at night.

Billy the Dude threw the newspaper, enormous heads and all, from him and swung around jubilantly toward Silkeen.

"Say, 'f I was de district attorney I'd tie a tin can to my tail an' chase meself clear over to Brooklyn. I'd git off de map. Sure."

Silkeen was broodingly uninterested. He drew deeply on his cigaret and exhaled slowly. The carpet under his feet was dirty and littered with butts, discarded and tramped out. He was fastidious about his personal appearance; not so much the fop as Billy, but neat and careful; and usually he seemed to have a little pride in his apartment—but not when Dolly was away.

He was more interested in his own troubles than in Cabron's escape.

The district attorney's office now knew that Cabron had used it as a cat's-paw. Too much and too watchful pressure was being exerted to keep Cabron from hoping to get a quick parole; but he had managed to escape in the very act of seeming to serve the law. He had murderously effected his escape on the eve of taking the stand against his former associates—or rather of pretending to be about to take the stand.

"Funny," said Silkeen without interest and scarcely moving his lips. "Misser Mid'ton pulls dat name on me two 'r t'ree times las' few weeks."

Billy the Dude drew a silk handkerchief from the breast pocket of his snug-tailored coat and deliberately wafted the kerchief across the polished tip of first one then the other shoe. After that he wrinkled his nose a time or two with a monkey-like grimace, and, cocking an eye, stared at Silkeen.

"Say, when youse try to use brains, Silkeen, youse pulls a boner. You'd better jump back in de cradle an' yell f'r somebody ter pin diapers on you'self, see?"

"W'at's eatin' *you?*"

"Me? Not'in's eatin' me. It's youse wit' de cracked coco."

"Awright. Gwan. Spill it."

Silkeen scowled, tramped on a half-burned cigaret and lighted another, sucking hard and swelling his thin chest with smoke as he eyed the little dude.

"Gwan," he repeated. "Youse'll bus' if you don't."

With a gesture of palm out and speaking from lips twisted almost to one side of his face by way of emphasis and contempt for any other facts than those he was presenting, Billy answered:

"Take it fr'm me, bo, them dagoes knowed *who* dey was after an' why. Yea-ah. A chive ain't like a gat. Youse have to git close enough to a fellow ter see 'em 'fore youse han' him his ticket wit' '——' wrote on 't. But if a guy blows off a rod maybe it ain't de right feller at-tall dat does de long flop. Maybe it's somebody else youse never meant to pot.

"But wit' a chive— Say, an' youse didn't git wise to de way Misser Middleton run in Cabron's name. Jus' so easy an' gentle like he never t'ought o' Cabron before. 'Member? An' out to Holder's dat night—don't he go right up to git an earful when I tells 'im dey've got dat dago's name in de air? See?"

Silkeen stared from the corners of his narrow, slanting eyes—eyes black as little specks of midnight, as impenetrable. Then he yawned and stretched himself, cat-like.

"Youse bug-house," he said, and lighted another cigaret.

"Me? Say. Listen. Do youse know who was in de nex' room wit' me listenin' in dat night youse croaked dem guineas?"

"Yes. Youse tol' me. Cabron's girl. She grabs off de Rawlinsons' ice. It runs in dat fam'ly t' make suckers out o' guys.

"Listen. I'm givin' youse de low-down. It's not stall wit' her. She's bugs over Misser Middleton. On de level."

"Bu-ey," said Silkeen unconvinceably.

"She tells me so."

"Gwan."

Silkeen gestured as if waving away an idiot.

"Aw right, have it your way. You's a wise guy. Youse know it all. Nobody c'n tell you somet'ing. No. You got a bunch o' brains like a lot o' mashed raisins. But I knows Leela's on de square wit'——"

"Did you git yours out o' dem Rawlinsons' jewels?" Silkeen demanded sarcastically.

"Oh, dat was a joke. Youse don't un'erstan'. She——"

"I don't un'erstan'. No. You's right. I don't. Dat kin' o' joke don't make me laugh."

Billy the Dude, hopelessly inveigled in the wiles of Leela, believing her explanation about it being a joke, trusting her interest in Middleton, meeting her every few days and telling her everything he could think of just to make conversation, did not dare confide the whole truth with Silkeen. It was less fear of what Silkeen might think than fear that Leela would learn of his failure to keep her secret trust in him.

"Say," Billy demanded, "I ain't no fool, am I?"

"I'll say so."

"Aw right. Youse c'n go t' ——," said Billy the Dude, peeved.

It was easier for him to break away by having a peevish air than by trying to argue or explain; besides, Billy did feel exasperated. He went away in a huff. It was nothing unusual. The enforced monotony of their existence in lying low caused many unembittered wrangles between them. Each would have lied, shot or swung for the other at any time.

WHEN Billy had gone, Silkeen picked up the discarded newspaper and with the slow labor of an imperfect reader plowed his way through the story of Cabron's sensational escape.

It seemed that there had been whispered warnings from various sources that Cabron would try to escape; but the district attorney's office had discredited these rumors and suspected that the "warnings" had been inspired by the men whom Cabron was coming from prison to testify against.

Cabron, it was said, embittered by the lack of help and sympathy from his friends among the Powers-That-Be was going to turn State's evidence.

The two officers who brought him down arrived in the city about 6:30 on a chilly Spring evening. No one outside of the official circle was supposed to know when he was coming.

He was handcuffed to one of the officers, and an overcoat was thrown over his shoulders cape-like, and fell in a way that partially concealed the irons.

As they came through the station it was hardly noticeable that he was a prisoner; and he was hurried to a waiting closed car. One officer mounted the seat with the driver; and the other, to whom Cabron was handcuffed, sat beside him.

The evening crowd swarmed with mob-like intensity and density through the streets, and the bustle, clang, hoot and distant oceanic roar that a city gives off took on the shriller, more hurried, insistent, impatient clash and rattle of some millions of people discarding the day and its work. The rush and crush of the twilight hours, with masses of people pressing in clusters, streams, jams, swirling and twisting at corners, pouring from shadows into the glare of cold, vivid, white lights is the nightly exodus of the Tribes of the Office.

At that hour it seems as if every man and woman on earth is afoot, and that all the autos and trucks and cars have been wound up and set going. Let so small a thing as a newsboy stumble in a dash across the street and fall under the wheel of a taxi, and at once the street is blocked. People rush pressingly forward. Traffic is backed to a standstill for blocks away.

It was more than a newsboy that held up the traffic that night.

Somewhere, a half-block or so ahead of the car in which Cabron rode, handcuffed to an officer beside him—with another on the seat with the driver—there was a smash-up, a collision between two automobiles.

Each owner blamed the other. Policemen shoved their robust shoulders through the swarm that clustered about the angry men, each blaming the other. One car seemed to be disabled. There were loud words. Threats. Names were taken. Orders to clear the street were ignored. The police began in earnest.

A fight started. There were arrests. Another fight developed. People pressed close, watching, listening. The street was jammed. Hundreds of people were being held up from trains and hot dinners.

The traffic was stalled, backed up like water behind an ice jam. Impatient ones snarled, cursed, threatened, demanded that the police do something—though the police were doing it hand over fist.

In a dozen places men suddenly became belligerent. Fist-fights started. The evening crowd was hungry and peevish. Men came to blows near the closed car that held Cabron. The driver and the officer beside him stood up, peering. The fight was quickly over, and people that had stared were settling back.

The jam ahead was removed. The traffic again pressed through. But the curtains were drawn in the car where the officer rode with handcuffs fastened to his own wrist.

When the car drew up before the Tombs Prison, from which Cabron was to be taken to the district attorney's office the next morning, and the door was thrown open, only one person was inside. The officer sat in a corner of the car as if drunk. He sagged with head adroop, and a thick, small stream of red ran down his breast.

No one could prove that the traffic jam was a part of the plot; and many people were astonished that so daring a crime would be committed in a crowd. Americans have not yet learned that a multitude is better than a wilderness for crime, nor the Sicilian saying that the devil will not trip an audacious man.

SILKEEN read slowly with the puzzled frown of one who is not quite sure of a word's meaning until he had had his guess confirmed by other words near by with which he is familiar.

Hunched over, the points of his shoulders sticking up, sucking steadily on a cigaret, he read through the story, but was not greatly interested. The deadly work aroused a little professional interest, but not much, for Silkeen was in the dumps.

By nature the thing of all things that he hated was inaction. He did not greatly care about his life. That was perhaps the Oriental in him. He would take any old sort of a chance with it.

Liberty was another thing. He wanted it as a tiger wants liberty, and for that reason he endured a very irksome confinement. He loved excitement, thrills. Gambling games fascinated him as parlor magic does a child. All that he wanted out of life was a kick, and it was growing harder and harder for him to get any kind of a thrill.

Silkeen was wanted and wanted badly. He knew it. He was suspected of many crimes that he had not done, but there were plenty he had pulled. Also he had been in the big prison break and got away.

Silkeen knew that he ought to stay away from New York. He was well known. But Dolly was there. Besides he had been born somewhere around Pell Street, and he felt the feverish nostalgia that Bedouins have for the desert and crooks for the city of their youth. They will return though Death's lipless smile awaits them.

Silkeen had the sort of face that is not easily forgotten—something of the Oriental and West. It was risky for him to stir out in daylight, and he used the shadows mostly at night. A glance and any wise bull could identify him as Silkeen Harry; and if the bull was full of wisdom he would not greatly care whether he took Silkeen Harry alive, for the crook would blaze away at the first sign of a pinch and he had an instinctive accuracy that made him rather dreaded.

So it was that Silkeen had too much time on his hands, with nothing but cigarets and dope to relieve the monotony of days. Also he had too much wealth for his peace of mind. At night when not used to drive the car he ventured to Tony Batteto's for a drink, a chat and a throw of dice.

But he lived a dull life, particularly with Dolly away. He did not read. He could not think. Sometimes he played a little game of solitaire; but that sport of invalids is hardly amusing to a man who has his life in the devil's dice-box.

As usual when he was bored unendurably, Silkeen got the opium layout, and, having tightly closed all windows, began to cook himself some hours of dreams.

He took opium as the man of affairs takes his after-dinner cigar—with a soothing, meditative drowsiness. Silkeen was not a hop-head. He was a coke-fiend, and took it with a needle, the way doctors themselves do when they yield to the blandishment of the Peruvian siren—not sniffing and sniffling like a kid with a bad cold.

Silkeen propped himself up in the bed with the tray on a little table beside him and dexterously turned the spatulate needle in the small, greenish flame of the alcohol lamp.

One, two, three pipes he smoked, and lay soothed in meditative drowsiness. Another and still another. The afternoon wore on. He lay in a state of rosy lassitude, at peace with the world, floating in glittering, purplish fancies, not asleep and not awake, but smiling wistfully like one who remembers pleasant things that have nothing to do with the present.

Sweet laziness suffused him. He would not have moved for the world—he scarcely could have moved. But he floated, or seemed to—and there is no difference between fact and fancy to the dreamer while he dreams; and he floated on billowy fragrances amid the splendor of Arabian-like fancies.

He did not sleep. He dreamed. Familiar objects that he knew as well as a man knows his own features took on the extravagant shapes and hues of grotesque lavishment; and he was not deceived but pleased.

The door opened violently and closed with a bang.

A girlish figure peered through the purplish smoke set astir and swirling by her sudden entrance. She was breathing hard and coughed. The thick, sweetly acrid smoke went into her throat stranglingly.

She gasped a hopeless, blasphemous little phrase of unconscious prayer, "Sweet —— help me!" as she started through the thick, veil-like traceries of smoke that stirred and moved as if alarmed by her presence.

She ran to the bed, bending down excitedly.

He saw her; he recognized her. He tried to smile and to lift a welcoming hand; but the effort was too great; the charm of lassitude too heavy.

The pipe was cold. He tried to mutter something. Another pipe—she should cook it.

She did not understand. She did not hear. She was too far away. He wasn't sure whether she wasn't a thousand miles away. She was talking. Her voice sounded as if it was coming faintly from afar. It didn't matter. No. Nothing mattered. It was a fragrant, beautiful, dear old world.

"—we have to duck. Matty Murdock picked me up an' I ain't sure I shook him. Oh, Harry—Harry, come out of it! Murdock, Matty Murdock, I tell you. He says to me, 'Still with Cat-Eyed Harry, huh?' "

Silkeen hated the word "cat-eyed." But it left him unmoved.

Also Matty Murdock was one of the people Silkeen thought wholly unfit to live, not only because of his profession, which was that of private detective, but because Murdock was stupidly in love with Silkeen's Dolly.

The message that Dolly brought was of the highest importance. And she had the mingled thrill and dread that a woman feels when bearing news that will make trouble; but Silkeen was doped, helpless; that is, indifferent.

She swore at him and said:

"You fool! I hate you!"

She stormed and called him bitter names, jeered and taunted; but nothing would stir him into life, though his was the most savage of tempers. He heard with the tolerant, far-away smile of one serenely above the irritations and trifles of that huge mudball, the earth.

Dolly had the hectic beauty, the almost forced, hothouse beauty of the feverish city. She was little more than a child; but the withered, wrinkled old Sybil knew less of life.

Crime heats the blood and hot blood ripens children. It is easy to cheat a calendar, but the heart keeps count of its beats; and sleepless nights, worried days, the thrills and tensity of the crime game, keep the heart hopping. Old age waits just where youth leaves off.

She was slender and blond, with hair that curled of itself, and she wore it bobbed. She was gifted with a lightness of step, movement and touch that gave her a whimsy charm as well as made her one of the best pickpockets in the business.

Many men offered themselves to her, partly through love, but mostly out of thrift, for she was a good worker and made big money. She preferred Silkeen Harry, perhaps fascinated by his strange ugliness and flattered by his reputation.

Rivals respected her choice. Silkeen Harry would shoot, and their respect pleased her greatly—as the superior prowess of the killer that wears her colors has from the Crusades down delighted the woman.

The door opened stealthily behind her. She scarcely heard it, but felt the inrush of fresh air, and whirled.

Matty Murdock grinned at her through the smoke, and a massive Colt, muzzle advanced, was set in the hand that swung low at his side. He was a solid, common-looking, ordinary fellow with rather rough features; and just then was pleased with himself, for he had let Dolly think she had shaken him off so he could follow her to Silkeen.

"Out o' the way, kid," said Murdock with a low-voiced, preoccupied air as he peered hard ahead.

He knew Silkeen and expected that it would be gun to gun. The cat-eyed chink would fight. So would Murdock. Most men will when there's a woman in it; and theirs was more than the feud of cop and crook.

Murdock took a slow step forward. The gun came up to a line with his waist.

"I got you, Silkeen. Don't move."

Silkeen Harry did not move. His eyes were open but glazed unseeingly. He heard, but with dream-like inanition.

Everything that intrudes itself on the opium dreamer falls with kaleidoscopic artistry in the beautiful pattern of fancy. Under the shadow of the poppy nothing can disturb the devotee.

"He's dead the worl'," said Dolly with shrill, agitated contempt, her head thrust forward, her body sagging brokenly as she stared at the bed.

Here was Silkeen, the deadly one, taking the collar like a drunken bum.

Dolly, like the sisterhood of the underworld, had no ethics and morals, at least none that could be identified as such by pulpiteers; she had impulses only, and at that moment she hated Silkeen as every woman hates a man at the moment of disillusionment. But she was too generous, or thoughtless, to hold a grudge; more likely she was too flighty in her mood for anything so permanent as a grudge.

"Dead the worl'," she repeated, her lips curled.

"Be deader 'n that if he moves," said Murdock, leaning forward alertly and watching for the first trace of movement from the crafty Silkeen. "You've been a fool, Doll, to stick by this thing."

"You smelled hop 'fore you come in," said Dolly, half-defending herself, half-accusing Murdock.

"What you mean, before I come in?"

"That."

She gestured toward the doped Silkeen.

"I didn't!"

Murdock's tone was aggrieved. He had done a daring thing and was accused of cowardice.

"I whiffed the pipe, but I didn't know how strong he'd hit it."

"O-ah," said Dolly unbelievingly.

"You think I'm afraid of *that*—any time—any place? Not me. No."

No answer from Dolly; but her blue eyes peered watchfully from under fluttering lids.

Matty Murdock was not a bad-looking fellow. He loved her. He was a private detective, but he had a good name among crooks. Oddly enough, when an officer of any kind has a good name among crooks it is because he is square, above graft, unafraid and unbribable.

He loved her. Once, because she seemed so young, he had caused her to be run in, and then he had talked to her like a father; but, finding her far from being the child of her years, he had talked of other things.

Dolly's great game was innocence. And if it is true as the legend of Eve attests, that one must have a feeling of guilt to be sinful, then Dolly was without evil. But no one who knew her, or of her, would believe that.

She was gaily, irresponsibly wicked because she wanted to be happy every minute of the day and night, particularly of the night. She was still in her teens; but already her skin was wrinkled a little; her eyes at times took on the absent, vague, tired look of the aged or the dissipated; and the mornings when she felt insufferably weary just to be alive were coming more and more frequently. But when she took a shot of coke she could snap her fingers and click her heels as merrily as ever.

She was generous and kind, perhaps because it was too much trouble to be selfish and keep a tab of persons to be disliked. She never hurt anybody, not even their feelings—unless those feelings happened to be too sensitively connected with the pocketbook her wand-like fingers nipped.

But somehow even so wise a fellow as Murdock had fallen for her, and fallen hard. If love were sensible few women would be loved and no men; for scarcely a person ever lives worthy of the idealism the magic passion puts upon her, and upon him. Murdock knew all about her; but he knew all about the shadows of the city, and so past sins did not seem so forbidding in a wife. Viewpoint is always a matter of familiarity. Besides, Murdock was a philosopher.

He had been a good friend to her and helped her when she blundered. Silkeen had been in prison when Dolly fell hardest. Murdock got on the job and pulled her out; then said, "Marriage."

Dolly had not laughed. She never laughed at the men who loved her. She liked them for it.

MURDOCK went to the bed and thrust a big hand in under Silkeen's pillow, pulling out an automatic and stowing it in his own pocket.

Silkeen's lips seemed to move in a hazy smile. His half-opened eyes were dull as little pieces of polished black stone.

Smoke filled the room like a thin fog. Murdock coughed and went to a window, throwing it clear open.

Dolly had not moved, but was watching him with nervous, sidelong glances. Her coat was open; but the tawny fur curled caressingly about her neck, and the fox-head lay on her shoulder like some watchful little creature looking out for dangers to its mistress. With her coat pushed back she stood, hands to hips, in the provocative, unconscious pose of a street-girl, half challenging, half-inviting.

Murdock stepped from the window, looking about him. He saw the telephone and went toward it with an appraising eye cast on the dream-drunken Silkeen.

Dolly knew what he meant to do. She darted out, and with hand to receiver stopped him from taking it off the hook. She pulled at his arm pleadingly, and, standing tiptoed as if the better to reach his ear, cried:

"Don't—don't give 'im up. He'll think I done it—don't you see? Me going off wit' you. He'll say we turned him up—that you was afraid. An' me—I can't have nobody say I ever rapped on a friend.

"Please—please, Matty. I can't go wit' you if you don't. I'll have to take the pinch too."

"You mean that?"

"So help me ——, Matty. I'm going wit' you. For keeps."

She stared up at him with the adoring fervency of sudden love; and the tawny fox jerked its head off her shoulder—perhaps to keep from laughing in Matty's face as his arm went around her, snatching her to him.

An hour or so later Silkeen stirred, groping irritatedly for cover. After the dope dreams he had gone into sleep.

It was night. The room was cold. He was half-frozen, waspish, stiff, in an evil temper. Something was wrong. —— wrong. Fresh air blew in as if the whole side of the house was out. The room was dark, black.

Mechanically he felt for his gun. It was just the instinctive movement that he always made on awakening. He poked about under his pillow, groping, unconcerned—then suddenly his flesh crawled and a nervous chill raced up and down his back. The gun was gone.

"What in ——!" he snarled, jumping up and fumbling agitatedly for the light-button.

The gunman, the bad-man, the moment his arms are out of reach, imagines a hundred dangers closing in. His fancy takes on the feeling of terror.

This feeling was greatly increased in Silkeen, user of dope, who had no muscular vitality, no mental balance. He had little besides a tigerish nervous system and jungle instincts.

As the light clicked on he saw the open window.

Some one *had* been there.

He tore the pillows and part of the bedding off. That some one *had* taken his gun.

He was at an utter loss to imagine or to try to imagine what had happened. The door had been locked. Billy the Dude had a key. Dolly had a key.

Silkeen snatched at the telephone. The hospital said that Dolly Devore had left that afternoon.

He threw the receiver at the hook and stood for a moment, feet wide apart, hands adroop, as his eyes darted around and around the room.

Without a thought of what he was doing he began with frantic haste to pack a suitcase by just throwing a few needed things into it; then, snatching a heavy overcoat, he scooted furtively from the room. He avoided the elevator, slipped down the stairs, and watched, waiting, for a chance to get out of the house while no one was passing through the hall. He hung like a black ghost at the first landing, watchful, patient and impatient, warned more by instinct than hearing of people's coming; or at least his hearing and impressions were so sensitive that he knew people were approaching before he consciously heard them.

It was around the evening hour, and the elevator was busy with somebody continually coming through the street door.

Silkeen watched. He was fleeing, not because he had a hunch, but because like any animal he knew it was time to get out when something strange and unexplainable had happened around his den. To the wary crook, the least thing that doesn't seem just right is a flaming danger signal; and Silkeen responded to the urges of instinct as readily as any other predatory creature.

Luck favored his caution. He got his chance and went through the door, onto the street and away, while two plain-clothes men from Headquarters poked about his room, wondering at the hasty getaway and how the —— he had been tipped off.

Matty Murdock, having the cop's outlook on life and crooks, and feeling that it were better to have a couple of mad dogs running loose than one Silkeen Harry, had watched his chance when Dolly wouldn't know and phoned Headquarters. He wanted Silkeen locked up. There was little personal fear in the matter, though he had good judgment and a knowledge of what was likely to happen. Also he understood Dolly's point of view—or thought that he did.

XVI

TONY BATTETO paid what he thought should have been plenty of percentage to protect his little gambling-joint, over his dirty restaurant, from raids; but he wasn't taking any chances that the police, in case they did double-cross him, would get in before his patrons had a chance to get away.

Tony was neither generous nor loyal, but he knew a good deal about the class of people that came slipping through the alleyway to the heavy, barred door that opened onto a dark stairs leading over his eating-joint. They paid well, but they were tough customers; also unreasonably suspicious as a class; fellows that had to hide their faces for a while; and if a pinch should be made in his dump they would hold him responsible.

And it gave Tony the shivers to think of his fat little body being laid out on a cold, marble slap while an inquisitive underling from the county medical examiner's office counted the holes.

Tony furnished cards and dice, real beer and light wines, plenty to eat, a muffled music-box, and enough police protection to make it seem a bit like the good old days to a choice clientéle of crooks, some of whom were molls.

It paid well. The drunken sailor is a piker by the side of a crook with coin; and Tony would do almost anything for coin except go out and grab it off for himself. He was the biggest coward in the world; and oddly enough he catered to and served the most hazardous and desperate of the city's criminals. For the most part they were fellows that were having trouble to "fix it" with the Powers-That-Be; some of them had lost their pulls or were without fall money, or maybe had croaked somebody whose friends had money and influence.

Billy the Dude came through the alley and kicked a few times in a peculiar way on the heavy door, and when it had opened slightly stuck his face close to the crack so his features could be identified by the flash of light that fell upon them.

The door, which was hooked to a heavy chain to keep it from being suddenly forced wide open after being put ajar, was then pulled back and Billy entered.

He ran lightly up the stairs, went down a darkened hallway where there echoed voices and click of dice, and through the door of a large room. As he closed the door behind him he stood poised for a moment, peering rapidly, cautiously around, to see who was there, drinking, gambling, chattering.

Red the Gob, a big brute of a strong-arm worker, sang out—

" 'Lo, Dude."

" 'Lo," said Billy without looking at him.

Every face in the room had been turned through the tobacco mist toward Billy. Among the devil's children everybody must recognize a newcomer for himself. Each stranger must be sized up or be vouched for. Eternal, unresting sensitiveness to danger keeps their noses in the air, for besides the more or less "public danger" from flat-footed harness bulls and springy-toed fly-cops there are private feuds and grudges, snitches, quitters and stools to be watched out for.

All movement and talk suspended for

just the moment. A fellow with upraised hand, clicking the dice by his ear as if listening to the number they promised him, stopped and turned to inaction for three seconds until he saw that it was Billy the Dude; then he threw the bones with grunt and snap of finger.

Eyes suddenly a-glitter under scowling brows had darted toward the door; each newcomer, though he were the devil himself, is an enemy until recognized. And at the instant of recognition the buzz and bustle went on again as if thrown back into gear by a lever.

These were not kingpins of crookdom, or anything of the kind. The kingpins hold their heads high as any son of a historic Dutchman and have their pardons framed before their crimes are committed. But all the crowd had good fronts with silk next the skin, patent leather across the toes.

The yegg type, with beetling brows, drooping shoulders, the furtive, wicked look, the soiled and ragged clothes, brogans, beard-spotted jaws, is what the great American imagination visualized at the word "crook;" that is, the popular picture is a barrel-house bum. Nobody wears better clothes than the up-to-date gangster, for if he finds anybody with a better front than his own he is likely to take it off him.

But there was a strained, seamed haggardness in most of their faces, an expression of predatory hunger, a sort of pinched look not to be accounted for by the thinness of feature, that marked them as professionals. It is an ironic fact that a crook seldom has a sound night's sleep until he is clapped into jail; the strain is over, the worst has happened, and in the first easement of reaction he finds a brief soothing rest on the cot behind the bars.

But not for long even there. His worries begin again in the fear that friends or lawyer will give him the double-cross.

"'LO, BILLY. Gee, but I'm glad to see a human bein'. Set yourself down. I gotta spill my long, sad spiel."

The girl, arms folded on the table, wearily put a cigaret between her lips and eyed him with half-sad amusement.

"W'at bited youse, Mame?" he asked, dropping into a chair and stretching his feet at full length.

"Me? Say, me boy does a tumble out to K. C. I tol' him to lay off them jay towns. It spoils a gun to work 'mong boneheads. He gits sloppy—like my Jimmy does, an' they put him away for two year. Two year in Missouri! I tol' him not to go hopscotchin' around in the backwoods like that. An' he does a fall that jars his back teeth out. I gets a wire—

"Framed. Stony and without a mouthpiece.

"Nice cheerful news, wasn't it? I'll tell the worl'! I takes ever'thing that's stickin' aroun' loose an' sends it to this here Kansas City. But it was a no go. The judge had spoked. The lawyer keeps the dough. Aw, ——."

She said it without bitterness, with a kind of dispirited humor, as if it were all a part of the game and she wouldn't squeal when hit.

Said Billy the Dude: "Aw, Mame, Jimmy c'n do dat on his ear. Two year—wit' good behavior off. It's a pipe, Mame. But w'y didn't youse let me know when youse needed de fall money?"

"Hatch my own eggs," said Mame wearily sipping her beer. "But listen, William. I ain't t'rough. I jus' begun."

"Shoot," said Billy encouragingly.

"I goes shoppin', see? An' don't no sooner get inside t' door before a tall, perlite guy wit' a badge under his armpit an' a smile comes up an' says:

" 'We hate to lose good customers, but'd youse mind patronizin' our rival 'cross t' street?'

"I stalls wit': 'Sir, youse insult me. I'm a lady!'

"He says: 'I know it, Mame. I agree wit' you, m' girl. But as a personal favor t' me, jus' shop across t' street.' So I take t' air.

"An' ever' place I go I'm spotted. I either get t' office or a shadow. Them department stores seem t' t'ink a shoplifter don't have to eat."

"Gee," Billy responded sympathetically.

"An' them Loudens makes a yell what almos' scares the Stature of Liberty off her perch. Didn't I have to send Jimmy some coin, quick? I did. Down t' street one of me Central Office frien's says—

" 'Mame, keep out o' sight 'r we'll have to run you in.'

"So I steps in the doorway an' digs down f'r my roll. He says, 'T'anks,' perlite as you please. I ain't gone a block before another un says:

" 'Mame, it was considerate of youse to leave them Loudens their wall-paper. The word's been passed t' grab you quick.'

"So I ups and outs wit' a stone I'd been savin' f'r meself.

" 'Aw right,' he says. 'I'll turn this in as recovered,' an' off he goes.

"Say, if I'd met any more frien's I'd had t' come home in a newspaper f'r a fig-leaf."

"Gee, Mame!" Billy exclaimed, a hand going down into his pocket and closing on a roll of paper money thick as his fist.

"Stow it. Stow it, kid. When I wants charity I'll hike round to t' Salvation Army an' get it, see?"

"But if you's stony?"

"Me? Say—look."

She thrust a silken leg out from under the table and pulled her skirt high, and a large lump just below the garter gave emphasis to the words—

"I c'd buy the gold fillin' out o' Rockerfeller's teeth."

With careless brush of hand she threw the skirt down, crossing her legs under the table.

"You's a wonder, Mame!"

"I'll say so."

"How'd youse do it?"

Mame gave him a long stare from the corners of her gray eyes and faintly shook her head.

"You wouldn't b'lieve if I tol' youse; but I ain't goin' tell. But listen, Billy. I want 'o tell youse somet'ing. 'Member I tol' you an' Jimmy them Loudens would frame that girl Frank marries?"

"Sure I do."

"Well, they're tryin' it. I listened in on a lot o' talk that's goin' on in that house. An' they got some guy that's willin' to say he's married to Frank's wife!"

Billy's astonishment was great.

Mame went on: "Maybe he is. I don't know. A lot o' girls get hooked up wrong an' 'cause they don't like to use arsenic on him they have to carry a bum of a husband along wit' 'em all t'rough life. Oh I'm f'r us women, strong. Ever'time. That's me."

"Sure," said Billy, vaguely but with emphasis. "Who is dis guy an' where is he?"

"Pete Burillo's t' rat's monaker, an' he's livin' in town right wit' t' Loudens. They're gettin' it all framed to run him in on Frank."

And Mame shook her head wisely, as if there were more that she could tell if she would. There was too. It would have explained the lump below her garter. Holder had rewarded her generously for the news which out of the goodness of her heart she had carried to him.

Billy sat meditatively wondering about this news. He said nothing of his own guess, but he rather thought maybe that fellow who had been blackmailing Mrs. Holder on the night of the robbery was this same Burillo. Middleton would be interested; and so would Leela Cabron; Leela especially.

"An' here I am," said Mame plaintively, "wit' a roll an' wit'out me Jimmy. I wish whoever drawed t' firs' map wit' Missouri on it had broke his wrist!"

At that moment Red the Gob swung a chair around, dropped it with a clatter and flopped himself down beside Billy the Dude, saying—

"W'at 's dis I hear 'bout Silkeen's Dolly hookin' up wit' Matty Murdock?"

Mame's protest was immediate and vehement. She knew nothing of the report, but denied it emphatically. Dolly wouldn't do it—not such a fool, for one thing.

Billy admitted something was wrong between Silkeen and Dolly, as she was out of sight and Silkeen didn't know where. Nothing like that had been suspected.

But Red the Gob told how somebody had seen her at one time, and somebody else had met her on the street another time, with Murdock.

"Sweet ——!" Mame cried. " 'F Silkeen gets wise——"

She buried her face against her palms to shut out the vision that she knew was prophetic.

XVII

IN THE gilded living-room of the Stacy Loudens an interesting conference was in session. It had been in session ever since dinner; and the dinner had been among other things a social success, because for the first time in the history of New York, De Brooms had dined under a Louden roof.

Of course Burillo had not counted as a guest. He was nothing more or less than evidence; and very precious.

Jessica De Broom, tutored among the refinements of her husband's people, viewed the gilt finishings of the living-room with the distaste of superior culture. As a matter of fact, Jessica liked gilt and ornate trappings, but she had learned that they were not the thing; so she consoled her envy with the knowledge that her sister lacked taste.

Helena, laced to the bursting point, but with a figure like a blown bladder nevertheless, was much agitated both by the social triumph of having her sister's husband and the scarcely less valuable triumph of having Burillo.

Louden's side-whiskers fairly fluttered with importance, and he chattered fussily with a sort of hip-hop, skip and jump, letting his tongue run in all directions, venturing on first this and that, and some other plan for opening brother Frank's eyes.

Louden had gone in what he thought was a brotherly fashion to Holder; and he must have said something to annoy his brother-in-law, who had spoken thus:

"Unh. I want you to—un—make it clear—I've tried to make it clear to you—un—I want you to make it clear to my sisters, and the whole tribe, everybody—understand—everybody—that I am entirely pleased with my choice in a wife. I know all about her. I know more about her than you do. And if you or anybody starts to bring any blackmailer into my affairs—don't start—unh—so much protesting. Your motives are as bad as a blackmailer's—just as bad—every bit.

"That's why I'm interested in immigrants. In their care. Education. America needs them. Unh. At least needs to do something to make them useful—we have enough loafers like you. Like me.

"What? Don't call it philanthropy. It is not. It is something you don't know anything about. Duty. Not philanthropy. Don't use the word 'welfare,' either. That's only for people that have to coddle themselves—unh—pet themselves with some flattering word like welfare, reform, charity. They don't know anything of Duty.

"Unh? Explain in the newspapers? It's none of the newspapers' —— business what I do. The future of this country lies with the foreigners. Old American families—you're the—unh—remnant of one. De Broom's another.

"The—uh enthusiasm—un energy—unh-un ideals of the future are right now in the foreign quarter of New York. 'Mong Jews, Dagoes, Russians. All that offscourings from Europe. Unh. Offscourings. Better than remnants.

"I know they're—unh—troubles. Some of them. They are the storehouses of raw material. The underworld draws on them. Heavy. All the time. The upper world has got to draw on them. Unh. Has to or—un—won't be anything left but remnants.

"Now listen, Louden. Don't you hint that I—un—haven't the right to spend that money. The only reason you think the Holder estate is a—unh—trust 'temporarily' in my keeping is because you want—unh—I'll say *hope*—I'll die before I have an heir. I haven't wanted to hurt your—unh—feelings. —— your feelings. I have feelings of my own. Especially about my wife."

With the memory of that conversation clear in his mind, Louden felt that they would have to go cautiously.

De Broom had the master brain. Thin almost as a parchment-covered skeleton, except for the recurrent coughing he kept his manner of cynical dignity. His graciousness was that of a courtier. Sinfulness had eaten his body out.

Both the sisters expressed piously the hope of saving Frank from the unscrupulous adventuress; and De Broom, waving his thin arm slowly as if sweeping something away, looked from face to face and said:

"That is all very well—but—" he broke off, coughing— "but you have to remember this: if dear brother Frank suspects our interest—" *cough—cough*—"he may be ungrateful enough to leave everything to some of these hospitals for foreign babes he is establishing."

The thought disconcerted the sisters, who had pretended to imagine that Frank would fall in their arms and thank them for having exposed the duplicity of the unscrupulous woman.

De Broom, always chilled when not being scorched with fever, looked around and put a hand to his shoulders.

"Feel a draft, dear?" asked Jessica quickly, running her hand along his back. "I do myself."

She looked around, a little displeased. It would be just like these Loudens to let Courtney get a worse cold. The De Brooms always referred to his cough, to his ill health, as a "cold."

"Yes," Helena declared anxiously; "I thought I felt it too."

Louden bustled about the register, turning on more heat, and poked his head into the hall and all about, but nothing could be found to have caused the draft.

Burillo, with a patch of discolored skin along the side of his forehead, sat back in a deep chair, a foot across his knee, a big cigar in his mouth, and listened with a feeling of importance. In his own words and mind, he was the whole show; all these big bugs were down on their knees to him; and he would get *his*, right. Comfortable, protected, well fed, he was quite pleased with himself and showed it.

A light robe was laid across De Broom's knees, and after a moment's sensitive pause he decided that there was now no draft, and went on with the talk.

"We must not appear in this at all, in any way." *Cough—cough.* "It will not be enough—" *cough*— "enough to have this—ah—husband appear and claim her. Brother Frank—" he always spoke the name with a peculiar half-amused inflection on the "brother"—"is very stubborn. When he——"

Cough—cough—cough. De Broom wiped his lips with a bit of soft linen, gasped a time or two, and rested for a moment while he breathed hard. Then he smiled, just wrenched the smile out of his pained face, and said:

"Pardon me for being so wheezy tonight. These Winters. But as I was saying. Brother Frank will not be in the least troubled by a little thing like a husband with prior rights. You seem to think he will welcome the chance to have an excuse to be rid of her. Nay, not so. Not so."

Cough—cough.

"He loves the girl. I know the symptoms."

Jessica patted his arm affectionately as if somehow he were referring to her.

"He loves her. At least he wants her so much that if this—ah—Mr. Burillo came in, Frank would in all probability make some sort arrangement with *him*."

Burillo was attentive. It seemed that maybe he had overlooked a chance. Here was an idea. De Broom's dry, hot eyes saw and read Burillo's face. *Cough—cough.* Then:

"Some sort of arrangement—for him—with some of Cabron's friends. She is Cabron's niece, you know."

Burillo's face fell. He contemplated the fiery tip of his cigar. Luck was with him. He would not spoil it by double-crossing these people.

"We must—ah—expose the woman's real character."

De Broom said it cynically, very well convinced as to her real character; for some detectives had been busy.

"She was formerly—" *cough—cough—cough*—"she was formerly, I believe, a performer in some low, very low, sort of Tenderloin place. Am I not right?"

The appeal was to Burillo. He was a little startled by the unexpected attention, and answered:

"Right—right. Oh, she's a bad one, I can tell you. I oughta know. Bein' my wife."

"Yes. Yes. Certainly. If Frank could just have his eyes opened to *that*—" *cough*—"side of her nature, ah!"

De Broom made a little gesture of triumph.

Helena and Jessica nodded solemnly and righteously at each other, approving.

Louden plucked thoughtfully at his vibrant whiskers. He was not thinking of Javotte, but of De Broom's cleverness. Louden wondered why he could not see and foresee things with such vision.

Burillo looked at De Broom and grinned. He understood, and he knew what was up. They were out to frame Javotte. Burillo knew that game, and it was all one and the same with him.

"But," said Jessica, "when Mr. Burillo makes himself known, won't Frank have to give her up?"

"Yes, my dear. But only long enough to get a divorce for her."

"But she married him with a husband living," Helena urged, bubbling the words out. "That's bigamy. We can send her to prison! Where she belongs!"

Cough, cough, cough. In spite of his pain De Broom was amused. There was enough of the devil in him to get pleasure at seeing the way people gilded their motives and played, often unconsciously, the hypocrite.

"No. No. Unfortunately there was a report of Mr. Burillo's death. It was even published, I believe. Isn't that—"*cough*—"so?"

"You're right," said Burillo uneasily.

"But," said De Broom, looking about to command and hold attention, "if we can arrange it so that the Tenderloin side of her nature appears at the same time her husband does—then Frank will have his eyes open and be disgusted!"

The strain of emphasis was too much. De Broom relapsed into a coughing spell that took his breath for the next fifteen minutes. They regarded him with sympathy; Louden and Helena trying not to show him they noticed, and Jessica with finger-nails to mouth watching in distress. Burillo, all eyes, started and harshly whispered—

"Gee, he's full o' bugs!"

When he recovered De Broom got up weakly. It was time to go home. He said they should leave the plans to him. Fully. He would arrange everything.

He smiled cynically, drooping his eyelids as if remembering some of the wild, mad nights that even now, in the midst of payment for them, he did not regret.

He was bundled into furred wraps and went out on Jessica's arm to the heated limousine.

WHEN he had gone the Loudens shook their heads regretfully, hovering over the register to take off the chill of the opened door. It would be their luck to have him die just as they had become friends; that was not the thought in their heads, but it was almost their feelings.

Burillo, night-hawk, stretched himself, feeling a little bored. He was one of those fellows, of whom the world is filled to overflowing, that can not be alone without being wearied. It seemed to him the people in this house did a lot of sleeping.

He thought about slipping out and running up-town for a breath of fresh air; but Cabron was loose. Besides, he had promised to stay within the Loudens' doors. The promise didn't greatly matter, but the danger of getting shot or knifed did matter; especially now that he was on the golden road to fortune.

"I wonder," said Louden, peering about as if to see it, "where that draft came from?"

"I distinctly felt it myself. Do you think it made his cold worse?" Helena answered, rushing the words out as if afraid there might not be another chance.

Burillo cut in with:

"Cold? You call that a *cold?* Say, De Broom's got T. B. so bad——"

But even he, thick-skinned as he was, saw that he was being offensive, though he just couldn't imagine why.

When Helena had left the gilt-hued room Louden said almost placatingly:

"Very sensitive, my wife. Sensitive nature; and so fond of her brother-in-law. Poor boy. I fear it is more than a cold. But isn't he a marvel at making plans and looking ahead!"

"Y'mean the frame-up on my wife?"

Louden looked mystified.

"Aw," said Burillo, "you understand well enough. An' I want 'o see you make a success, don't you see? Now a good way to work it would be to get her some place, see? In a room 'r something with me. Ain't I her husband? Then let this Holder find us. He'll know right off she's double-crossed 'im. An'—" here Burillo grew almost dramatic, he was so pleased with the idea— "an' you ain't doin' nothin' wrong to the girl, f'r she'd only be in a room with her legal husband!"

Louden nodded approval. That seemed a good idea. He would tell it to De Broom as his own.

When Burillo went up to his room he wasn't sleepy. He sat on the edge of a chair, smoked a cigaret and looked at the bed. Pretty soft for him! He liked it all right; but a bit of something doing would have helped out a lot. He would like to see a show or something.

He got up and eyed himself in the mirror. Except for that bruise on the side of his head he was a good-looking fellow. Anybody could see that. He bent closer and squeezed out a blackhead.

He was going to clean up on this bunch. Already they had paid a little something handsome in advance. He stroked his breast pocket. Bad luck couldn't land on a guy all the time. It was his turn to carry a rabbit's foot.

And ——, but wouldn't he like to be locked up in a room with Javotte for a while! He'd even up matters a bit. If that black-masked burglar hadn't walked in—Zowie!

"I'd like to get that fellow some place where he wasn't lookin'!" said Burillo to himself, setting his jaw hard and glaring into the mirror to show ferocity.

His door opened swiftly, noiselessly, before he could turn from the mirror; and the man in a black mask appeared, gun advanced.

"Not a sound!" said Middleton quietly, coming in and pushing the door noiselessly closed behind him.

The warning was not needed; for about the only sound that Burillo was likely to make was such as might result from the falling of his body, since his knees threatened to give way.

He was scared, as any man might have been, but a little more than most. He not only lacked a certain natural bravery, but had many fears hovering about him; and this masked fellow from whom he had tried to steal Javotte's diamonds was intensely disquieting.

"The last time we had the pleasure of meeting," said Middleton, ironically gentle, almost reproachful, "you left in a hurry. Now I have come for my share of those trinkets."

"W'y—I—eah—" said Burillo.

For the first time it was occurring to him that possibly he had been robbed that night by some one who was not a pal of the black masker's.

"Yes. I understand why you feel that way about it. Very regretful, are you not?"

"But I was robbed!"

"Ah," said Middleton; "so was I."

"But—but—look!"

He put the fingers of both hands to the bruise on the side of his forehead.

"Unconvincing. You should have made yourself a better alibi than that."

"But it *is* true. Right outside the house. Hones'!"

"What was that?" Middleton asked smoothly.

"Hones', I say."

"I see. Get into your coat there. Bundle up. We are going for a little ride."

Burillo had had the ague coming on from the moment he saw the black mask reflected in the mirror from over his shoulder; but the full force of the shaking chill caught him then. It was bad enough for this fellow to have appeared; it was worse for him not to believe the jewels had been stolen; it was terrible for him to drag Burillo out at that time of night to some sort of revenge.

Burillo shook. He could hardly speak even if he could have thought of something to say; but his wits seemed frightened into a flutter.

"Ah," said the cool, polite voice of the ironic Middleton, "you too seem to have caught cold from that draft I made this evening. Into your overcoat."

Burillo begged. He promised. He lied. He desperately did everything he could to get a little mercy. He insisted that he did not have the diamonds. He offered everything he had, and all that he expected to get. It was scarcely an effort for him to offer so much since, whatever his intentions at the time, he would never have taken the trouble to do as he said.

He seemed to think Middleton was angry over the diamonds, and he grew fervid in pleading to be believed; but the mask watched him coldly, listening indifferently. His only answer was a gesture toward the overcoat.

"What—*what* can I do to make you believe me?"

"Nothing."

Burillo moaned, begging to know what would be done with him.

Middleton answered—

"I know where the Holder diamonds have been pawned."

"What?"

Burillo's jaw hung open as if he were trying to catch words with his mouth.

"I say, it is nothing more than right that I should go after them, and perhaps it isn't difficult for you to guess why I wish to keep my eye on you."

"I don't get you," said Burillo blankly.

"There is no need that you should," Middleton replied.

Burillo struggled hard to understand. His eyes had a glazed expression, the absent-minded look of one who is thinking hard and without success. Middleton let him think, for Middleton had the assurance of one who has all the time in the world and is never hurried. Anyway fussy, busy people waste their time and themselves in a sort of frantic scampering.

A half minute. A full minute. In the long silence there was scarcely a moment; then as Burillo reluctantly started across the room toward his coat there came a gentle insistent tap-tapping on the door.

On the lightest of tiptoes Middleton moved to the door, at the same time gesturing for Burillo to open it. All doors open inward, and whoever stands behind them is sheltered, concealed, from the party entering; a little arrangement that every night worker often takes advantage of.

Burillo's voice shook. All of his nerves were unsteady. He asked—

"Who is it?"

The handle turned. The door was not

locked; it came open, and a man sardonic and triumphant said with low-voiced menace—

"Eet is I, Cabron!"

And so it was.

CABRON as usual was doing his work with methodical surety. He was no lone-handed worker. A grim, low-visaged individual sat with folded arms and a revolver dangling from each hand before the twin beds where Louden and his wife took their repose. Louden's whiskers sensitively responded to the frightened quiverings of his jaw muscles. Another fellow with the face of a pirate and a gun large enough to command respect from anybody stood with back to the door of the butler's room, into which had been herded, in breathless quiet on pain of their lives, the three or four servants in the house.

Cabron was no petty pilferer of households; but his friends did not object to carrying off whatever showed a tendency to stick to their fingers; and the Loudens were due to believe themselves cursed by the patron saint of thieves, for three times they had fallen foul of them. But on this final occasion their home was, in the parlance of those who do such things, cleaned right.

Cabron, erect, alert, sardonically pleased with himself, came through the door with a sort of inflexible air, his hard gaze fast on the terrified Burillo; and he looked neither to the right nor to the left, but closed the door behind him with a careless shove of his left hand. His right held an automatic, set at a deadly angle.

Cabron was not a big fellow, and he looked as little like a gangster as a parson should. There was something, very much in fact, haughty about him. Why he had it or where he got it would be impossible to say. Perhaps some fiercely patrician strain had wandered and sifted down through loves and liaisons until without the title, but with unsubdued quality, it appeared in this curious Latin, gangster and grafter of the city's Tenderloin. But patricians are all grafters, though the more euphonious "perquisites" and "entailments" and "hereditary rights" soften the insult; so perhaps Cabron was only being true to the blood.

Anyway, in any place, he would have been a man of distinction by his mere appearance. He had the eyes of a fierce, untamed bird, direct as a beam of light. He carried his head up, and the thin features, sharp, firmly cut, gave an air of pride that was borne out by his manner and speech. There was no mercy and no scruple in that cold, fierce face.

"Ah-ha," he said with the cruel pleasure that some people have in playing with the mouse, "at last, is it? I confer the honor on you of making you the husband of my niece, and you go hide away where you can't be found, and say that you are dead! Ah-ha, it will now be sure that you are."

Cabron felt something touch him in the side. It was the muzzle of Middleton's gun. Cabron whirled; but his wrist was caught and the gun thrust upward while the mouth of Middleton's nestled almost hungrily against the gang leader's stomach. Cabron was as disarmed as if his gun had fallen to the floor.

But over the edge of his shoulder Middleton watched Burillo and spoke incisively—

"Keep *your* hands out of your pockets."

"Oh—w'y—ah—" said Burillo, jerking his hands from his body.

"If I didn't know your way of working—that you have the house full of crooks," Middleton said easily to Cabron, "I would shoot now."

Cabron's muscles contracted at the word as if he had received a blow.

"Yes," he went on, quietly, but hard of voice, "because sooner or later somebody's going to have to shoot you. I might as well."

A curse hissed with liquid venom from between Cabron's thin lips.

"All right. Let up on that gun. I want it."

Middleton's fingers crawled up along the wrist and closed on the gun that Cabron gave up, for muzzle-on the automatic pressed against his stomach; and he was face to mask with that Black Wolf. Cabron knew him by the cold, easy voice and half-bored, contemptuous manner.

Middleton, having the gun, dropped it into his pocket, then with a swift gliding gesture thrust his hand up under Cabron's coat on the left breast and drew out an eight-inch stiletto, sharpened to a needle's point, flexible and strong, dangerous enough to have slain Goliath himself.

"A nice thing to prick a man's heart

with," said Middleton as without looking at what he was doing—keeping his eyes on Cabron, with a quick glance from their corners at Burillo—he drove the point of the stiletto into a table's top and snapped the steel. "Isn't it?"

No answer.

"I wonder," Middleton went on a little reflectively, "if I could guess *why* a man of your many matters of revenge to attend to, should concentrate on a third-rate crook like this. Is it because with Burillo dead and out of the way, whoever tries will have the —— of a job to prove that Javotte had a husband living at the time of her marriage?"

Cabron cursed him again with quick sibilant intensity.

"Don't be so much like a serpent. I don't like snakes," Middleton told him. "You see, Cabron, there are no two ways about it—you have to kill Holder, don't you? Yes. Your honor demands it. He sent you to prison."

Again the hiss of anger and threat.

"Yes, yes. I may have had something to do with it. But when I get ready to send you any place it will be to ——. You are going to kill Holder, that's certain. He knows it. Very sensible man, Holder. But what he doesn't know perhaps is that you have to kill Burillo first so there will be less chance of your niece being beaten out of her widow's share. Have I guessed right?"

"The devil eat you!"

"——!" said Burillo in a kind of frightened prayer, getting his eyes open to the importance his body had in the affairs of men.

"And you feel yourself competent to take care of your niece—and her inheritance? Is it not true?"

Cabron was outraged and furious. He had the pride that quivers visible under insult. His eyes burned and gleamed.

"Of course there would be complications and haggling at law; but any one so competent as yourself and friends at framing evidence would clearly establish that the real Burillo was really dead before Javotte married again. This fellow, an impostor! He ran away. Disappeared. Knew he would be exposed in court. *That* is why you are here tonight.

"This fellow Holder, he must be taken care of pretty quick. There won't be much left, the way he is wasting money on hospitals and schools for a lot of dirty foreigners. Is it not so?"

Every muscle of Cabron trembled as muscles do when held fiercely rigid.

"All right, Burillo. Tie his hands. His mouth—gag it."

"You touch—I'll keel you!" Cabron hissed furiously at Burillo; and the fellow hesitated.

"Go ahead," said Middleton with inflectional menace; and he obeyed.

Cabron's eyes glittered with passion.

"For a jailbird you are very squeamish, my friend. Is a handkerchief so very much more humiliating than handcuffs?"

The answer was curses.

"Put your weight to the knots, Burillo. And now the gag."

Cabron set his teeth. He would not open his mouth. No. His hands had been tied behind him. Middleton reached out and grasped him by the hair, jerking his head back; then he thrust the muzzle of the gun between Cabron's lips, rasping the sight of it along his teeth, running it back to the base of the jaw; and as the mouth came open the muzzle went into it as a wedge. It was merciless, but effective.

"Now, wide open, or I'll break some teeth."

The mouth widened. The look on Cabron's face was that of an animal being forcibly fed something violently disliked.

"Now, Burillo, poke it in. Stuff it all in. Don't be afraid of choking him. I can see you are very anxious not to offend, but you'll have to get at least two handkerchiefs into his mouth or he'll make a noise like a deaf-mute trying to give a fire alarm."

When Cabron's mouth was stuffed and he was breathing through his nose in the jerky way of a person both angry and suffocating, Middleton without word or sign of warning suddenly tripped him, but let the body come without force to the floor.

"Don't kick or you'll be laid unconscious," he warned, bending over Cabron; but Middleton's face was half-turned and his eyes were on Burillo, who did not see that he was being watched.

Burillo picked up the broken stiletto, still long enough to be deadly, and in passing behind Middleton had raised it for a quick blow at the base of skull.

With Cabron bound and Middleton out of the way, Burillo would have felt himself in something of the position of a conquering hero. He could have locked his door and made enough noise to frighten every one in the house half to death and attract the police to the neighborhood, which would have got himself made into a hero.

But unlucky influences dominated his star. Middleton was about as easily caught off guard as the trained, cynical crook among enemies ever is; and he turned as he arose. He did not strike Burillo. He threw up his hand to ward off the blow, and warded it skilfully, but without anger.

The broken dagger fell out of Burillo's hand; and he shrank back, expecting to be struck down, perhaps shot.

"I see you are sorry," said Middleton with polished, insulting irony, bitter, menacing and mocking, yet quietly spoken. "Very sorry to have forgotten yourself."

Then in the tone that one might use to a strange dog—

"Tie up his feet."

Burillo moved with nervous, fumbling rapidity, anxious to do what was expected, but continually jerking his eyes up expectantly—afraid that he would be struck when not looking.

"Now," said Middleton, "back up to me with your hands behind you."

"What—I——"

"Shall I make my request more polite? Then *please* do it."

Burillo edged backward in haste, bringing himself up to Middleton who tied the fellow's hands behind him; then warned:

"Don't open your lips, no matter what happens. And something will probably happen. All right, ahead of me—into the hall."

With a parting glance at the half-strangled and explosively rageful Cabron, trussed like a chicken on its way to market. Middleton pulled the door closed after him and came out into the up-stairs hall.

He could see no one of Cabron's men, but heard movements below, and with a guiding push headed Burillo for the stairs.

"Come down on your feet," said Middleton. "Don't sneak."

So Burillo, who had been on tiptoes as if trying to slip across thin ice before it discovered his weight and broke, walked a little more naturally. Middleton followed close behind, masked, but easy of manner. He carried a gun in his right hand, and the left slipped into his coat pocket.

As they started down the stairs some one below heard them coming. A burly shape crossed the hall and stood at the foot of the stairs looking up, no doubt with increased puzzlement as he made out the mask.

"Here, what's this?" he called hoarsely.

Middleton did not answer him, but spoke roughly to Burillo; saying:

"Go on. You get nothing by hanging back. Get down there, Burillo."

The squat figure at the foot of the stairs understood about Burillo. The situation looked more understandable to him, all except the strange person in the mask. Anyway, awaiting developments, he stood alone and did not call out as he might have done if his suspicions had not been somewhat diverted.

"Here, who are you?" he demanded, a gun leveled on Middleton.

"Get on down there, Burillo."

Then to the man:

"I? I was planted in the house to take care of this fellow. Here's a little passport from Cabron. He's cleaning up papers and letters in Burillo's room."

As he spoke, Middleton turned slightly, holding out a piece of paper in his left hand for the fellow to look at; and the burly one took it and glanced down to see what was written on it. The blow caught him alongside the head with crushing force. Middleton struck quick and hard. The fellow crumpled, stunned, nearly dead, sinking at the foot of the stairs.

"Quick, out of that door," said Middleton, giving Burillo a shove and looking behind; for voices could be heard in the hall above where some sort of noise, like the thump of falling bodies, was being made. Cabron was lifting his legs in the air and dropping them to attract attention.

* * *

AS THEY went out of the front door into the chill, dark night, Middleton caught Burillo by the back of the collar, half-supporting and half-shoving him; and in a fast dog-trot, running on their toes, they went almost two blocks and stopped before a limousine.

The door of the car was jerked open by a quick, shadow-like figure, and Burillo was half-pitched into it.

"All right, Harry. Go ahead," said Middleton.

And the car drove off, leaving Middleton where he stood.

The inside of the car was unlighted.

Burillo, at first mystified, then hopeful as he saw Middleton being left behind, felt his blood freeze as he dimly made out a menacing figure leaning forward from a corner of the car, and felt the sharp prod of a gun's muzzle.

Said Billy the Dude:

"Don't youse start not'in', see? 'R I'll plug youse. W'at 's de matter? Got a chill 'r somet'in'? You's shakin' de car—youse'll wear out de springs. Stop it!"

The car with powerful noiselessness was cutting down the street with the deceptive speed that the wheeled leviathans have. At twenty miles an hour a flivver rattles like a skeleton with the ague; but one of the big patricians can do thirty-five without disturbing a traffic policeman's sense of duty. Silkeen, unless pressed, was a rather cautious driver. He did not want to get into court on so trifling a thing as speeding.

As the car rolled on Billy the Dude amused himself by a one-sided conversation. He was of a talkative nature and scarcely paid any attention to what he was saying, being one of those cheerful, amusing fellows that like to feel their tongues on the move:

"Hard lines, huh? Say, w'y don't youse set still? Youse met dis crowd onct b'fore. Say, dis ain't so; dis is only a bad dream. Youse jus' pinch yourself hard enough an' youse'll wake right up."

And as he talked the car went on rapidly. Burillo, hands still bound, bent his head to peer from the windows, and could see lights and the bulking vague fronts of buildings, but did not know at all where he was. He tried to ask Billy, but was told to keep his shirt tucked in and he would find out.

In what seemed the midst of darkness the car stopped with motor running.

"Here aw-ready?" Billy asked himself, peering out. "Yep. Dis is w'ere we change cars f'r de big show. Out youse come, bo. Watch yer step."

Billy had got out first and pulled at Burillo's shoulder as he crept reluctantly into the dark alleyway. A half-block away a small, dirty, yellowish light marked a doorway.

"Let 'er go," Billy called; and the car, starting up rapidly, moved down the alley-like street and vanished at the first corner.

Right in front of him was a doorway; and with his back to it Billy kicked three times slowly, then pausing, began again to plant his heel heavily against the door.

It opened slightly behind him. He looked around, holding his face close to it, and a flashlight struck blindingly on his features and vanished at once; then the door opened with a clink and rattle of iron links.

"In wit' youse. Hurry up!"

Burillo, trembling and so weak that he stumbled and would have fallen if not caught, moved forward.

Billy gave him a shove so that he fell against the man inside; then Billy, glancing swiftly up and down the street, darted through and the heavy door closed.

The entire incident had taken less than two minutes, being manuevered with the furtive rapidity of Crookdom.

Inside they stood in a small, narrow space at the foot of dark, narrow stairs that ran up into gloomy vagueness. A small, dirty, electric globe burned at the end of a long cord that hung as low as their heads; and a short stout man with black, bristling mustache fitted a heavy bar in place across the thick door. This was Tony Batteto.

He settled the bar into place, grunted a little, and, turning around, caught hold of the cord and held the globe close to Burillo's face to have a look at the prisoner being given into his custody.

Tony stared hard. His little mouth opened slowly. His small, piggish eyes widened. The uplifted hand holding the light began to shake. As he started to talk the words seemed tumbling over each other to get out and his voice was excitedly emphatic.

"Take-a heem out! He can't stay here. I won't do it. You have to take-a heem away!"

"Like —— I will," Billy the Dude flared with challenging menace.

He had the fighting man's immemorial contempt for the innkeeper. Besides, it is always bad to let anybody think for a minute that he can get away with a bluff.

"I won't hide heem! My life, it will a-not be worth—pouf!"

"Youse said it. Not wort' dat!"

And Bill snapped finger and thumb before Tony's short nose, at the same time bringing the muzzle of a gun to bear on the swollen waist-line.

Tony swore prayerfully, and Billy answered him with curses.

"Hey," a hoarse voice called down from the darkened top of the stairs. "Wa't's comin' off? Youse guys holdin' a meetin'?"

"Dis fat-head bum's welchin' on de showdown," Billy sang out.

"Croak 'im," said the hoarse voice with

careless humor; and the heavy footsteps bore away Red the Gob, who had approached with stealth to get a line on the row; but, finding nothing there to interest him, he withdrew indifferently.

"Hear w'at Red says?" Billy demanded as convincingly as if Red the Gob's word was final judgment.

Red the Gob, ex-sailor and strong-arm worker, kept Tony in a state of nervous humbleness anyway.

Then, as Tony was silent, but silent in the manner of a man whose tongue has been turned to stone, Billy demanded with half-tolerant inquiry:

"W'at 's eatin' youse, anyhow? Does you know dis bird 'r somet'in'?"

And Tony lied fearfully, saying that he knew nothing about the fellow; that his sole reason for backing out of his bargain was that he felt he would get caught helping in the kidnaping; he would make enemies and somebody would bump him off, or the police would get unreasonable.

Tony, much as he loved the silver clink of metal dropping pocketward, would not have mentioned Cabron's name for a hundred dollars. Cabron was deadly; Cabron had friends; and Cabron had passed the word to all his friends and friends of friends to keep an eye out for Burillo. And here was the man that Cabron hunted.

Tony's fat little body was a-tremble. He shook in his shoes, being afraid of Billy the Dude and even more afraid of Silkeen Harry, who had been along when they made the agreement to stow away a fellow for a few days. But most of all Tony was terrified by Cabron.

However, the more immediate danger is always the more terrifying.

"Now get me, an' get me right. Youse t'row me down on dis an' somebody—I ain't sayin' who, but somebody—'ll give youse a free ride in de stiff-wagon. Youse said you'd stow dis bird f'r fifty bones a day—now stick! See?"

The last word was emphasized by a rapier-like thrust of the gun's barrel. Tony grunted and crumpled.

Burillo had listened with dazed attention, fearful and mystified, his back to the wall. He leaned against it heavily, for there was no strength in his spine or knees.

"Gwan, Tony; lead de way," Billy said with an authoritative air.

And as Tony went ahead, a push and shove with "Get up there," started Burillo. He went as if climbing the gallows' steps. Billy followed; and half-friendly he commented—

"De only t'ing de matter wit' youse, Burillo, is dat you ain't got no luck."

On the landing of the first floor up they came into the sounds of half-suppressed revelry, gay voices partially lowered, the clink of money, the click of dice, the shuffle and scuffle of feet. The men and women of the night were half furtive, even in their pleasure, relaxed, at ease among themselves—though the crook never knows a complete unworried relaxation unless he is doped, and dope does not leave him rested.

One must travel the steep, rocky, narrow road to get rest out of sleep; and the honest boob snores away his ten night hours without being nervously alert to mistake every creak and rattle for a fly-cop's footfall. If he had a proper appreciation of values the honest boob would lie awake congratulating himself on his ability to sleep like a log.

Tony led the way up a second flight of stairs, where he turned on a light, and, putting a key into a padlock, opened a door into a cold, windowless room, filled with some kind and another of discarded stuff, old furniture, broken, and boxes and barrels.

"Get up some blankets an' keep 'im full o' hot soup 'r somet'in'. He ain't doin' no bread an' water. An' f'r fifty bones a guy oughta get somet'in'. In youse go, Burillo. Don't start nothin' or somebody 'll wallop your bean. Here, I'll let yer hands loose. Youse jus' kipper away your time an' dream o' dem happy days w'at are a —— of a ways behin' youse."

Tony shut the door and snapped the lock.

"Give dat bird a doss an' plenty t' eat," Billy repeated as he started down the stairs.

"Oh, I will take-a care of heem—take-a care of heem!" Tony answered with sinister unctuousness, glaring at Billy's back.

XVIII

THE striking incidents in the lives of night workers would naturally most often occur at night; and one who made a practise of entering people's houses would find fortune inattentive if he did not frequently get into trouble—and out again. So Middleton was neither disconcerted nor irritated when he heard a key in the lock and knew that he was being interrupted before he had really got started on the big, formidable safe which was camouflaged as a part of the wall and which had its face covered by paneling that could hardly be distinguished from the rest of the room's interior surface.

He swung the paneling back, shut off his electric torch and noiselessly retired behind a tall cabinet of miniatures that was set in the corner. As a good burglar will always do, he had first made sure of the nearest way out in case of a surprize; and next he had selected the most suitable place for concealment. By moving the cabinet a very few inches he had adjusted it nicely to the need that he had foreseen.

Though Drount was a hearty bachelor he did not come into his apartment alone; and he seemed pleased, intensely pleased, by his companion, who looked about her with the slow, studious appraisal and half-critical air of one observing the furnishings for the first time.

Drount looked at her from the corners of his eyes; he looked at her full in the face; he looked at her continually. Though of an exuberant, talkative nature and inclined to make every woman feel that he would be greatly gratified by the least favor she showed him, Drount was plainly trying to be agreeable to the young, striking and rather supercilious lady that had come home with him, unchaperoned.

"I can't imagine where Toino is," said Drount after ringing twice. "He didn't expect me and must have gone out. These servants!"

And poor Toino, all tied up like a goose for the roaster and wedged tightly into a closet where he could scarcely move and therefore had to be quiet, prayed in two languages and to all the gods he knew anything about. The main thing was to get out, for his muscles were cramped and they ached fearfully; and almost equal to the main thing was the wish that a certain unknown but black-masked person should have all of his bones broken and the marrow sucked from them.

Drount gabbled. He put on his most pronounced Frenchiness and most charming manners. Drount was one of those people who wore manners much like clothes, and changed as occasion suited. He assured her of the pleasure he felt in having his little apartment—a big affair it was, with a living-room large as a small auditorium; a pretty penny indeed he paid the landlord—honored. Wouldn't—ah—just a little something, would she like it? Cordials, wines, brandy, whisky. Very fine stock. What would be pleasing?

"Whisky," she said carelessly, uninterested.

"Yes, ah."

Leela Cabron looked around the "little apartment" slowly with lifted eyebrows and a half-smile. There was a kind of regal *ennui* about her; or as she was scarcely old enough for a queen, the air of a wearied princess who no longer got a thrill out of being told that she was beautiful. As if indeed any mirror would not show her as much. But the weariness did not conceal the tigerish alertness that she had. Her eyes might be half-mocking and a little, just a little flirtatious, but also they had the impact of one throwing a challenge.

Leela Cabron knew Drount and plenty of men just like him. She knew every thought and move, almost every vibration of his. She had felt his sudden realization that here was a —— pretty girl, one he had known for a long time; but only in the last day or two did it strike home that he would have to look far and wide, wear his legs a couple of inches shorter trotting around, before he found a more stunning and provocative maiden than this daughter of notorious old Cabron. And of course a woman of her kind was like an apple on a fruit-stand—to be paid for and carried off.

Some days before Leela had sought him out to renew an acquaintanceship; and her intentions were as innocent as a woman can have when she wishes to dispose of jewels that have been stolen. They had grown more than friendly, almost intimate. She made him something of a confidant, and got his merry congratulations on evening her old score by looting loot from Black Wolf.

Drount, especially this night, had grown rapidly in love with her, and showed it.

Leela, erect, straight-shouldered, looked at him and smiled; but he was too much blinded by his own eagerness to see that there was cruelty in the turn of the lips. Almost every man she knew was in love with her, and she got a sort of pleasure in detesting them; not a genuine pleasure, of course, but the kind of gratification that contemptuousness always gives the person who feels it.

Drount lifted his fingers playfully and hurried off for the whisky. Something told him that this would be a pleasant, aye and profitable, evening. He came back with the decanter on a silver tray and two small glasses with threads of gold at the brim. Leela poured out a jolt of whisky big enough for a stevedore and drank it off as a cockney maiden takes her gin.

"Another?" asked Drount encouragingly.

"All right," she answered with an irritated overtone, which seemed to say:

"You think I am pretty much of a fool; but that I will be a bigger one if you get me drunk; and I will just show you a thing or two that you never knew before about Leela Cabron—when mixed with whisky."

But Drount's ears were not tuned to catch overtones. He brushed back his wavy hair, smiled beamingly, put an arm gently around her shoulder to relieve her of the fur's weight and let his hand lie for a moment with the gentlest of caressing pressure.

Leela had been in a reckless mood before she took the whisky. Recklessness is something that compounds itself faster than interest in the hands of a usurer; and she was not far from the breaking-point.

She looked at him, and then at the hand on her shoulder, then back at him. She was not insulted, she was not indignant, she was not amused. She was just telling him to take his hand away and keep it away. He caught the wordless message and did as told, but of course felt this was the rebellious coyness that every woman assumes in some shape or other because she likes to be coaxed.

"LISTEN, Drount," she said coldly, harshly using his last name. "You made a big mistake when you gave me whisky. Whisky makes me businesslike and doesn't leave any soft woozie feeling at all. I am in trouble, and I need a friend who——"

Drount, unabashed, unrepressed, was instantly at her service. He rubbed his hands and beamed, shrugged his shoulders with an air of submission to her least desire.

"— a friend who likes me well enough not to make love."

"But ah, such an ordeal! Impossible, Leela. As well expect one to yield to witchcraft without being charmed!"

She drew a cigaret, which he hastened to touch with a match, and through a stream of smoke eyed him doubtfully. Leela crossed her knees, and a sharp little toe stuck up straight as a spine as she slowly swung her leg and eyed him.

"I'm in a —— of a pickle," she said with an edge to her voice as if half-proud of being in a dangerous mess; and either she or the whisky seemed determined to do away with womanish grace and softnesses in dealing with Drount.

And he liked it. He had taken a couple of shots himself, and liked the bitter flavor of this girl, cynical, fanged, clawed, poisonous and hectic. She had already confided enough to make him feel that the intimacy gave privilege. He assured her that he and his resources were at her feet.

"You know Mame Sims? No, Drount, you wouldn't know her. She's not a swell crook—just an ordinary little shoplifter. Well, Mame says it's curiosity makes girls go wrong. Mame's right. That's what made me take his finger-print to my friend in the Identification Bureau. I was just curious to find out. ——!"

She said it with self-disgust.

"I found out."

"I believe," Drount answered with oily agreeability, "there was an incident of that kind in the Garden of Eden. The woman wanted to find out."

Leela stared at him, not understanding, not greatly caring to understand. There was just the least little suggestion in her manner of that jerky rigidity that often follows a couple of stiff drinks. Some people grow fluid and oozy, others quarrelsome, still others jerky and dignified—all according to their personality and the character of the booze.

"Well, I found out. My friend's been stepping on me—on *me*, Drount—ever since. He wants the fellow that owns those finger-prints. Huh, I told him I found them finger-prints, and they looked interesting. Think he'll believe that? He won't. He guesses I know this Black Wolf personally.

"That's the trouble with the police. They don't respect a lady's word. Don't try to hide that whisky. Give me a drink."

Drount protested as gracefully as he knew how, but with an imperative flash of her hand and tilt of chin she commanded; and he served.

"Now if anybody thinks I'm going to turn up Middleton, they'd better go shoot themselves and get rid of their craziness.

But, Drount, my friend in the Identification Bureau says if I don't tip him off to who owns those finger-prints that he will frame me. He'll do it, too. He's just that sort of a friend. And with my father hiding out—there are plenty like you, Drount. You men love me, but that's where it ends. You're not worth a —— as friends. Oh, shut up. I'm doing the talking.

"I wouldn't turn up anybody to the police. You know that I wouldn't turn up a nigger that had stole my last crust of bread. No, not if he stole my last bottle o' hooch. But Middleton—" she leaned forward savagely, moving with a suddenness and fierceness that caused Drount to start— "I'll kill him!"

"No, Leela. You're——"

"Don't you say it! Don't you dare say it. Don't you tell me I'm drunk. Uh!"

Drount protested such thing was farthest from his thoughts, and she answered carelessly—

"You're a liar."

Drount was beginning to think he had made a mistake, a big mistake, in not bringing out cherry cordial or something; and the hand-strokes to his hair, the wavy hair, were thoughtful rather than ostentatious.

"Listen," said Leela coldly. "You know my cousin? Well, all Holder's relatives are out to frame her. And I'm running the show. You know why? Why I am so awfully interested? No. You don't know why. I'll tell you why. You'd never guess. Nobody would ever guess. Nobody knows it but me. And now you are going to know it. But you couldn't guess in a hundred years. Not in a million years. She is Black Wolf's sweetheart."

"No!" said Drount, astonished.

"Yes!" said Leela, emphatic.

"I don't believe it."

"Neither did I, Drount. But it is true. Oh, that black devil—give me another drink."

"No," protested Drount.

"*You* tell me what I do or not do! Hand me that tray, Drount."

She looked at him, and there was very little that was drunken in her eyes and a great deal that was menacing. Women, if in a mood for a scene, are as likely to break out over being refused a bonbon as they are at being dragged around the room by the hair. Leela was in no mood to be crossed in anything. Drount became really alarmed as he saw the size of the drink she now took.

"Now listen. I'll tell you something, Drount. I hate this Middleton. You know that. I always hated him. Javotte too. She thinks she is as good a dancer as I am! Middleton's hers. They are working Holder. That is their game. I am on to them. I am the only one that *is* on to them."

"But—" Drount protested.

"But nothing. Didn't he carry off all the ice she had coaxed out of Holder? That was framed between him and Javotte—Middleton's graft. And listen; Javotte's got another husband. Holder's relatives had him, had him living with them, ready to spring on Holder and jar him loose from that vamp.

"What happens? Drount, Middleton gets hep and kidnaps that fellow. Why? To save Javotte. Some other things happened that same night—" she stared at him fiercely—"but that is enough for you. He won't save her. I'll see to that. May the devil eat his soul— You've no idea how I hate that fellow."

"Yes, dear—" the voice was endearingly soothing—"I have."

"Keep your hands off me!" she flashed.

"I was just——"

"Don't just. Keep still. I am putting on a show—one of De Broom's old kind. You know De Broom. I am putting it on for him, and Javotte will be there. It will be some party, Drount. You'd better come. I'm inviting you.

"Holder will be there. And Javotte. They won't come together, though. They won't leave together either. There won't be nothing left of Javotte but the crums. I'll show her up. You know De Broom's parties?"

Drount looked wise, smiled suggestively and admitted that he had heard of them.

"Coming, aren't you?"

"Where," asked Drount with a jesting air but half-serious, "do I come in?"

Leela regarded him with exaggerated, angry disdain; and her answer was:

"You have already come in for enough to satisfy anybody but a Fifth Avenue tradesman. You gypped me on those Rawlinson things and he—he——"

She was highly offended even by the memory.

"He knew I had them and never come near me. I waited weeks!"

"I don't know of what you are talking," said Drount, interested though.

"You don't need to. It isn't about you. I am not talking about you. I never talked about you. I never will. But Black Wolf—oh, I'm going to kill him. Yes, Drount. I have it all planned. I'm going to kill him."

A stiletto, which to Drount's startled eyes appeared about a yard in length, flashed up out of her bosom and hung gleamingly as if to come down on him. He moved back rapidly, his eyes on the blade, hands outspread as if to check the blow.

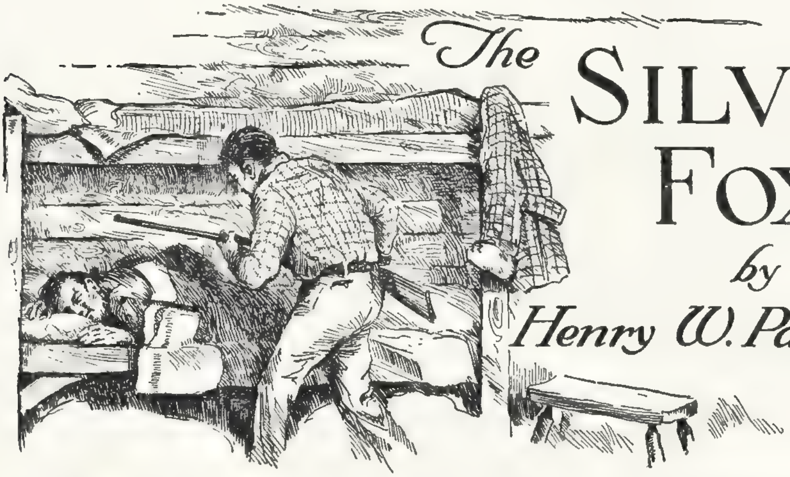
She did not notice Drount at all. Her eyes were focused on the picture she was making for herself, so that for a moment or two she stared trance-like, saying:

"I'm going to kill him. Then I'm going to send for my friend from the Identification Bureau; and I'll say:

" 'There, Henry. There—take all the finger-prints you want. He's yours!' "

"Stop!" said Drount, frightened by this spasm of passion, unaware that women really did talk and feel like that.

TO BE CONCLUDED



The SILVER FOX

by

Henry W. Patterson

ONTARIO Winter held the north woods in its grip of ice and snow. All nature lay smothered. Bitter piercing cold penetrated even to the hearts of the giant forest evergreens, whose frozen fibers now and then with sharp explosions gave way to the sullen wrenching of the frost.

To the men in the cabin by Wapiti Lake, such weather was ideal. Said Jim Conroy as he slowly heaved his great bulk across the room to replenish the fire:

"I hope she lasts this way. Pelts is sure prime in this temprachoor." He spoke with deep booming voice, slowly, heavily.

"Yup!" snapped his partner, Pete Wethers.

In startling contrast to Conroy, Wethers' voice sounded like the barking of a fox. And he looked like a fox—a sly, wily face, eager and wise. But he had none of the fox's fun-loving honesty of countenance. Wethers was sly with the slyness of perversion, cunning with the cunning of greed and lust. He was small, misshapen, slightly humpbacked.

His face was a true index to his character. The French *voyageurs* of the post at Trois Lacs called him "*Le Furet.*" But he was energetic; he knew the woods and could wrest a living from them. This was why Jim Conroy, when Ben Saunders took a notion to go see his folks in Ottawa for the Winter, agreed to share his cabin and trapping-grounds with Wethers "for the sake of company."

Conroy was the only man in the country who could have been persuaded to spend a Winter with "The Weasel." But nothing ever bothered Conroy, a slow good-natured simple-hearted giant of the wilderness; all Wethers' ill-natured complaints and fault-finding passed over his head like Summer breezes.

He sometimes felt, as was indeed the case, that Wethers held him in contempt and scorn, but so long as Wethers kept to his own trap-lines and cut his share of the firewood, all was well on Wapiti Lake—so far as Conroy was concerned. His creed was the creed of all good woodsmen, that a partnership is a sacred thing, not to be violated under any conditions. Therefore, he treated Wethers just as he would treat old Ben Saunders, were he in the woods instead of in Ottawa.

Wethers realized this and sneered to himself, like a weasel.

One evening Conroy came home early to the cabin. His snow-shoes swished more vigorously than usual and in his eyes was a light of exultation. Wethers was still out, so he set about getting supper.

He opened several dusty cans, retrieved from a dark corner of the larder, and spent much time in preparing what was, compared to the usual beans and tea, a veritable feast. To crown the occasion, he poured out two liberal drinks of whisky from the precious emergency flask.

Wethers came in and stared, amazed.

"What the —— is this?" he asked peevishly.

"Pete," said Jim, in placid happiness, "drink your drink. I got a silver fox."

"What?" yelped Pete, startled.

"Yessir, an' here she is!" Jim thrust his hand into his shirt-front and pulled out a pelt of glossy black, the long hairs of the back fading to shining silver at their tips.

Pete was speechless, but his little beady eyes, slanting and close together, spoke volumes of greed.

"Say," he said at last, "I get half, don't I?"

He snatched the skin, fingered it lovingly, smoothed it, rubbed it the wrong way to see the shining silver change to black and again to silver.

Jim looked at him calmly.

"No." He shook his head. "No. That ain't in the agreement. You git your share of the use of the cabin, your share of the traps and your share of the food, which you paid half for. But we each of us gits what fur we catch, on our own lines, an' no more."

The storm of abuse, pleading and argument which followed this statement made no more impression upon Conroy than pebbles thrown at a mountain. He only felt in a mild way that Wethers was presuming upon their partnership. He forgave him this because he was excited.

Conroy drank only a little of his whisky, so Wethers obligingly drained the cup, after finishing his own. After supper Conroy set about cleaning and stretching the pelt. As he worked, slowly and carefully, his heart was warm with happiness, for he held in his hands more money than he had ever had at one time in his life before.

"Mebbe two hundred dollars," he thought and planned to surprize his partner with a gift of five or ten pounds of plug tobacco, as soon as he had sold the skin.

Wethers, after watching Conroy for a while, turned in and lay for hours staring at the wall. He heard his partner turn in below him, satisfied at last that the silver pelt was clean and ready to be cured by the action of wind and sun. Once, long after Conroy had gone to sleep, he got up, sneaked silently to the gun-rack and took down his rifle. Quietly he cocked it, tip-toed over and stood beside Conroy.

The big man slept like a child, one arm thrown over his head, the other lying limp along the rough pillow. Wethers raised his rifle and shoved its muzzle almost against Conroy's forehead. His finger touched the trigger. Then he hesitated and began suddenly to tremble violently. Through his mind had flashed a picture of Conroy lying dead in his bunk and of himself, running through the forest, clutching the silver fox pelt, pursued grimly, relentlessly, by the sheriff and his posse. He knew the efficiency of these men, and feared it. He lowered his rifle and returned it to its place on the gun-rack.

Then he crept back to his bunk. He dared not try to steal the pelt—Conroy would trail him forever and catch him. He dared not kill Conroy, for fear of the police. He *must* have the silver fox, though. Conroy, the big thick-head, couldn't appreciate its value half as well as could he, Wethers, who had been about a bit and knew somewhat of the world. But how to get it? So he lay, his little evil eyes boring into the darkness, devising, scheming, planning.

NEXT day dawned bright and clear. Wethers, looking out of the window, rubbed his hands and smiled crookedly with a furtive side-long glance at Conroy.

At breakfast he was singularly cheerful, talking nervously, at random. Once he said—

"Say, Jim, how long do you s'pose it'll take to cure that pelt?"

Jim considered.

"Why," he replied, "if I stay home an' tend to it, as I'm goin' to, it ought to be pretty dry by tonight, I guess. Why?"

But Wethers seemed not to hear the question. As he was preparing to start out, he suddenly asked—

"What's the date today, Jim?"

When they had consulted the dingy calendar, he smote his thigh.

"By ——! I've got to see Injun Billy at the post tomorrow night. I've got to go out, sure. Clean forgot it. Told him I'd see him about a partnership next year. Wants me to go with him to the Waboos, after beaver. Great animal, the beaver. Can't afford to miss that chance." He talked on excitedly.

"Say," he said suddenly, "why don't you come out with me and git rid o' that silver? Pretty dangerous havin' it 'round if the cabin caught fire, eh? You better do that."

Jim looked at him, surprized at this volubility.

"All right," he answered, more to be congenial than for any other reason, "we'll both go out."

"Fine. We'll git an early start an' make it before dark."

And Wethers strapped on his snowshoes and headed for his trap-lines, which extended along the lake shore.

The mid-Winter sun shone brilliantly all day, piercing the forest gloom with intermittent patches of scintillating, sparkling brightness. Conroy, watching over the silver foxskin, turning it often to make sure the air would dry it equally on all sides, caring for it as tenderly as if it were a baby, thought much of his partner. It was characteristic of him that he bore the humpback no malice for his unpleasant traits and shortcomings. To his straightforward mind, almost childlike in its guileless simplicity, a partner was a partner and under that name could do no wrong.

That evening, getting supper, Conroy heard the sound of two shots, in quick succession. He listened and presently they were repeated. He recognized Wethers' rifle. What could he be giving the trouble signal for? He ran out into the darkness and shouted. An answering halloo came from the lake. Ten minutes later he found Wethers, wandering about aimlessly, with his muffler bound tightly over his eyes. He was moaning and cursing in misery.

"What's wrong, pardner?" Conroy's big voice was suddenly husky with pity and anxiety at the other man's helplessness and evident suffering.

"Snow-blind," grated Wethers between set teeth. "Hit me this afternoon, crossin' to Bear Portage. Can't see nothin'! Been tryin' to git home ever since. ——! It's ——!"

Conroy led him stumbling to the cabin, where he tenderly bathed his swollen and inflamed eyes with warm water. He had never seen a case of snow-blindness before, so ministered to his partner's sufferings as best he could in ignorance.

He talked softly to him, trying to get his mind off the pain of his eyes.

"All right, pard. All right. You'll be better tomorrow. Here, I'll put you in bed, and you can go to sleep, mebbe. How was the traps? Got a skunk in one of 'em, didn't ye?"

"Yup," snapped the Weasel, strangely tense.

"Thought I smelled a little skunk on you."

"Yup," said Wethers, "he was no good, but I had to kill him to git him out of the trap. He didn't squirt me, though. Say, I got to go out tomorrow, snow-blind or no snow-blind. I kin make it, if you'll give me a rope to hold on to, an' keep to the river. You'll do it, won't ye? It means money to me. I got to see that Injun Billy about the beaver. Don't leave me here, will you?"

He grew almost hysterical in his earnestness. Conroy agreed soothingly, but Wethers would not rest until he had extracted a rigid promise from his partner to take him out tomorrow. After a short silence, he asked:

"Where's the fox? Is it all right? You want to be careful of it, you know. Take no chances. You got it safe?"

"Sure," grinned Conroy. "She's right here in my shirt-front. I'll take care of it, you bet."

When Conroy turned in, Wethers was apparently asleep. The big man was mildly astonished at the sudden cessation of Pete's pain, which had seemed so intense a short half-hour before. He stood looking at Wethers a moment.

"Poor feller," he thought, "guess he's about all in. But that warm water done the trick all right. I'll wash 'em again in the mornin'. It's sure the stuff for snow-blindness."

Wethers moved restlessly, and presently turned over to face the wall, with his misshapen back toward his partner. Conroy quietly settled down in his blankets and went to sleep. As he was losing consciousness, he again felt a little glow of grateful pride that he had found so quickly and accurately a good remedy for his companion's sufferings.

He was awakened next morning by Wethers, calling petulantly for him to get up and make ready to start for the post.

"How's the eyes, Pete?" asked Conroy. He shivered slightly in the chill of early darkness.

"Rotten. Worse'n last night. I got to see a doctor, I guess. Say," he added, as his partner began to blow the glowing coals in the fireplace to a blaze, "we got to git started. Must be light, ain't it?"

"No. Not for an hour yit. I'll heat some water an' wash your eyes agin. Seems to do 'em good, don't it?"

"You will not," yelped the Weasel, suddenly panic-stricken. "Don't do a —— bit o' good. Makes 'em worse. Worst thing in the world for snow-blindness."

"Why, I thought—" began Conroy, a little hurt at this outbrust.

"Don't care what ye thought. I won't undo my eyes, I know that. Best thing for 'em is to keep 'em covered. You git breakfast, an' leave me be." He tossed about, muttering and grumbling.

AN HOUR later the two men were on their way to the post at Trois Lacs. Pete, holding to a leather thong whose other end was tied to Conroy's belt, stumbled along alternately cursing his companion's haste and complaining peevishly at the slowness of their journey. Jim held his peace, only hurried as much as possible to get a doctor for Pete's eyes. There was small chance of any medical aid at the settlement and he might have to go down to Cobalt.

Travel on the hard-packed snow of the river was easy and before dark the partners came in sight of the post. Pete fell silent and did not speak until they entered the log-house of the factor.

ARCTIC OCEAN
ALASKA
BERING STRAIT
BERING SEA
BRISTOL BAY
PACIFIC OCEAN
SCALE
DOMINION OF CANADA
YUKON
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Indians, *voyageurs*, some trappers, and Angus McMurtry, the sheriff, were in the long, low-ceiled room, crowded around the stove. In a corner behind the counter was the factor, checking fur-bales for shipment. As Conroy led Wethers into the store, the conversation stopped and all looked curiously at the blind humpback. McMurtry and the factor came forward and shook hands with Conroy, asked how the trapping was up his way, made a remark or two about general subjects, but avoided any reference to Wethers. Conroy explained.

"Old Wethers, he went snow-blind yesterday. Any doctor here? I brought him out so's he could git fixed up."

"Oh, Father Caillaux will be in tomorrow. He knows somethin' o' medicine," said the factor. The sheriff said nothing, but looked at Wethers with intentness.

"I'm a lot better," whined the Weasel. "Guess I'll be all right by tomorrow. Say—" he hesitated. "Is Injun Billy hereabouts?"

"*Non,*" said a *voyageur*. "Beelee ees oop de Waboos tr-rappin' beaver. Ah see heem tree day hago at Portage des Loups. He have vaire good chance, he tell me."

"——," said Wethers and breathed more freely. "I was goin' to see him here about a trip. Guess he's forgotten it." He dismissed the subject from his mind. "Say, Barrett," he added, "can I see you a minute?"

The factor led him to the corner where Wethers in great agitation pulled a pelt from his shirt-front and laid it before the other. He tried to look triumphant.

"How much fer that one?" he asked.

"Why," said Barrett, "I guess about a dollar."

"What!" yelled the Weasel, "A dollar? Why, man, that's worth a thousand, an' you know it."

"You're crazy. No gray fox is worth more'n a dollar."

"Gray? That's silver. *Silver!* Ain't it?" Wethers suddenly leaned forward and thrust a drawn, startled face at the factor. "Ain't that a silver?"

"Naw, that ain't no silver," answered Barrett, contemptuously.

Wethers gasped. He shriveled, held his head in his hands, moaned and was silent for a second. Conroy stepped forward, was about to speak, when Wethers turned like a flash, his mouth, below the heavy muffler, distorted with rage.

"Conroy!" he shrieked. "By ——, Conroy, I never thought you'd do that. Take a man when he's blind and rob him. My own partner, that I trusted. Boys," he went on, and his voice broke as a wave of self-pity swept over him—a cunning actor, was the Weasel, acting desperately for high stakes— "boys, he robbed me. An' I trusted him. My own pard, boys. Why didn't he kill me? He didn't dare to, I guess. But he had the nerve to bring me here, right after he'd robbed me, relyin' on his reputation an' my blindness an' hump-backed unpopularity to git away with it.

"Ah," he cried in triumph, "I know. I'd told him I was goin' to keep the silver dark until I went out to Cobalt in the Spring, so's I'd git a higher price. He thought I was plumb blind, an' he'd be safe. But I fooled him. You won't stand there, fellers, an' let that big thief rob a poor ol' blind man of all he's got in the world, will ye? I can't see, or I'd kill him myself. He robbed me in my sleep an' put a gray skin in place o' the silver, thinkin' I'd never know. I never thought there was such dirty people in the world!"

He broke off and sobbed, head in hands. He almost believed his story himself now, so intent was he on putting it across.

Conroy was stunned. He could not believe his ears. He turned his bewildered face to the crowd.

"Pete," he began slowly.

"Sheriff!" cried the Weasel suddenly, "Search him. I demand you to search him!"

As McMurtry hesitated, Conroy fumbled at his shirt and slowly dragged forth the shining silver pelt.

"Here she is," he mumbled, staring at it. He held it almost gingerly, as if it too might suddenly have become unreal along with the rest of his world. McMurtry stepped forward and took the skin.

"Barrett," he said, "put that in your safe for a while. Now—"turning to the Weasel—"let's hear your story straight."

The Weasel's eyes, could McMurtry have seen them, shone with a furtive triumph. His whole plan had depended, for its success, on getting the crowd with him before Conroy's slower mind could grasp the situation. He seemed to be succeeding. The men stood in a silent circle. They had been ready to sympathize with Wethers, because he seemed to be desperately in earnest, and men instinctively side with the under-dog. Woodsmen, though apparently phlegmatic, are in reality very emotional, and their emotions are primitive. Having decided in favor of Wethers, their sympathies went to him with a rush. It looked bad for Conroy.

The Weasel told a coherent and straight story. He had caught the fox and in an unguarded moment had shown it to Conroy. Yesterday he went snow-blind. He carried the silver skin in his shirt-front, and, waking up this morning, had felt it still there. But he had dreamed a dream, in which he lost the pelt. (This was cunningly thrown in for the benefit of the Indians.) It worried him, so he thought he'd better sell out. He never suspected Conroy for a second. But he had been mistaken in his partner. Conroy had done him dirt, and changed the pelt for a gray. Thank God, he had not told Conroy of his decision to sell immediately.

That was all. His eyes would be well in a day or two, but where would he go? He couldn't go back with Conroy.

Here he launched forth again in invective accusations, tears and self-pity. Leaning against the counter, he clutched fiercely the gray pelt that had almost been his ruin. He wound up his outburst with another dismal question as to where he could go, what he could do.

The men stirred uneasily. To violate a partnership, was a heinous crime. To do it moreover in this cowardly, sneak-thief manner, was worthy of death. Law was primitive in the region of Trois Lacs, and its action was swift.

The eyes of one of the Indians glowed.

"Ah t'ink shoot," he said quietly, gazing at the sheriff. A murmur of assent ran around the circle.

"Boys," said McMurtry, "I want to talk to Conroy. Barrett, take care of Wethers and keep him here."

He took the bewildered giant by the arm and led him into the back room of the store.

"Now," he said, "what about it, Jim? Is that true?"

Conroy shook his head.

"I thought not. I seen a man snow-blind once before, up in the Barren Land, an' he didn't act like that. Shall I take off his bandage an' see?"

"No," he said, "I seen already. He's blind all right. He was sufferin' last night an' this mornin'. Besides, why should he make out to be blind if he ain't?"

The big man could scarcely comprehend the situation. He was numbed. All his ideas, all his ideals, had gone by the board, had been outraged, trampled upon, made a mockery by this man, his partner. His world was shattered and in the face of the ruin he stood inert and passive, dazed, bewildered. Even now, he hardly believed Wethers' actions. His mind tried to find a reason, an excuse for this horrible turn of events.

The sheriff laid a hand on his shoulder. They were old friends, which was why McMurtry believed in Conroy. But he also realized that, with the crowd against them, they would have a hard fight to prove Conroy innocent. And the time was short. Already they heard murmurs, guttural oaths, restless moving about in the front room. McMurtry groaned in helpless rage at his own impotence.

Of course, they might fight or try to get away, but a fight meant at best only a few hours of grace and to run was out of the question for an officer of the law.

"Say," he said suddenly, "I'll turn you loose, an' you can make a try for it in the woods."

Jim slowly shook his head.

"No," he said, "I don't run."

The sheriff leaned forward.

"Then for ——'s sake, think! *Think*, man. How can we prove you didn't steal that pelt? Put your brain in action. You haven't much time. I'm only a sheriff, you know. If them fellows once git out o' hand—" He shrugged his shoulders.

The giant sat motionless. Slowly, with a great effort, he began to form a semblance of order out of the tangled thoughts which filled his mind. He rehearsed each detail of the previous day's events—breakfast, Wethers' excited talking, the curing of the pelt, the distress signal, his partner, snow-blind, helpless and suffering and, finally, his own joy at being able to ease the pain of Wethers' eyes.

At this point McMurtry heaved a sigh and slowly shook his head.

"I don't know very much about snow-blindness," he remarked, "havin' seen only one case of it. But I bet just the same Wethers ain't snow-blind, no matter if you do say he is. I bet he's foolin' you. Nothin's too low-down for that skunk to play."

Skunk? Skunk? thought Conroy. Oh, yes. He'd smelled skunk when Wethers came in last night.

Then, slowly, hesitatingly, like Winter sunrise, a light broke over him. He leaned forward.

"If we can prove Wethers ain't snow-blind, we're all right, ain't we?" He used the plural with childish instinct for company in distress.

"Yessir, we are. But how you goin' to prove it? Nobody 'round here knows anythin' about it. It's pretty near unknown in these parts. Besides, you say yourself he was blind, an' his eyes swollen."

"His eyes was swollen, all right, but perhaps it wasn't from snow-blindness. I'll tell you what I think."

THEY talked it over at length, Conroy waking up and becoming more alert and active each minute.

"It's a pretty long chance," said McMurtry finally, "but, far's I can see it's our only one. I'll try to talk to 'em first, an' see what I can do."

He went to the door.

"Boys," he announced, "we're goin' to get this straight. Now listen. Conroy ain't guilty. I know it an' you ought to know it. An' I——"

"Shut up!" commanded one of the trappers, stepping in front of the sheriff and his charge. He glanced back to be sure the crowd was with him, then went on.

"We bin talkin' it over amongst ourselves. Wethers answered enough questions to satisfy us he's tellin' the truth. We all know you're a friend of Conroy's, an' so nacherly you'd stand up for him. Now we want to git straight as much as you do. You *show* us Conroy didn't play it low an' dirty on Wethers, an' show us quick. If you don't, he's guilty! Am I right?" he asked of his companions. The men rumbled their approval of his words.

"That's right," cried the Weasel, "don't let 'em fool you with talkin'. They bin cookin' up somethin' in that back room. Make 'em prove it to you. They can't do it an' they know it."

A silence fell while McMurtry studied the situation. The faces of the men were set in grim determination. Further remonstrance against their decision, the sheriff realized, might easily prove worse than useless by fanning the smoldering anger of the assembly into white-hot, reckless rage.

"All right," he said at last. "We'll show you, if you'll come up to Conroy's place tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, I'll keep an eye on Conroy and Wethers, both."

The men, in little groups, had begun to wander out of the building when Conroy on a sudden thought, rushed to a window and looked out at the sky. Then he talked excitedly to the sheriff, who immediately swung around and threw up his hand.

"Boys!" he shouted. "It's makin' up to snow! If you want to see the proof that Conroy's innocent, you'll have to trek up with me right now to his cabin. We can't take a chance on waitin'. Come along!"

In a few minutes the whole crowd was under way. The sheriff would not consent to leave Wethers with the factor, so they hauled him along on a toboggan. McMurtry and Conroy were in the lead, and the latter set a tremendous pace. He realized more and more keenly the need for haste.

IT WAS after sunrise and the storm had already broken as the party halted on the shore of Wapiti Lake in front of the cabin. McMurtry spoke:

"Now, we're here to show you fellows somethin'. You said you was took blind at Bear Portage?" He turned swiftly to Wethers.

"Yup!" snapped the Weasel, positively. But he stirred uneasily.

"If," said McMurtry, "we prove to you that this Weasel ain't blind at all, you'll believe then that he's a liar an' a skunk, won't ye?"

Wethers started, then laughed confidently.

"Go ahead an' prove it," he jeered.

McMurtry walked in the thickening snowfall toward Bear Portage, directly across the lake. He was gazing intently at a tangled trail. The men shuffled along behind, guarding Conroy closely. Wethers on his toboggan brought up the rear. He was alert, furtive.

The snow fell more and more swiftly, gradually blotting from sight the forest across the lake. McMurtry at length stopped and pointed ahead.

"Look there!" he yelled in triumph. "Could a blind man make a trail like that?"

He pointed to Wethers' tracks of two nights ago. They wavered and wandered near the shore, but they stretched across the lake in a bee-line from the direction of Bear Portage. The men stared.

"An' if you'll take the trouble to follow that trail you'll find where the white-livered weasel put skunk-juice in his eyes to make 'em swell up. Oh, he's a clever lad, all right, but he made a mistake this time—an' it'll be his last, too!" added the sheriff with emphasis.

He turned upon Wethers, but that individual, trusting to his legs rather than the clemency of justice, had torn the bandage from his eyes and was making for the woods.

Rifles were up in an instant, but Conroy, with a roar like an angry bull, had leaped in pursuit and the men could not shoot without hitting him.

The Weasel's misshapen figure was fairly flying through the storm. Conroy, however, now at last thoroughly awake and at a white heat of rage, gained on him with great, uneven leaps and bounds.

At the shore he caught him. He roared again, incoherently, as his hands closed upon the Weasel. And the Weasel screamed in shrill terror. Once Conroy struck him, then his fingers closed over his throat and he shook him as one would shake a rat. Wethers tried to fight him off, then of a sudden he gave a spasmodic jerk and sagged limply.

Conroy tossed him to the snow and stood over him, waiting for him to rise. But the Weasel lay strangely flat, with his head askew at an unnatural angle. Sprawled out like a blot on the face of nature, he was a horrible and grotesque figure.

The sheriff ran up, looked at Wethers,

then bent and examined him closely. He rose and put an arm across Conroy's shoulders.

"You broke his neck," he said, soberly. Then added, "Justifiable homicide, I call it. What, boys?"

And the crowd, who would have shot Conroy a short two minutes ago, growled deep-throated oaths of assent.

Conroy watched the men put the crooked body of the Weasel on its toboggan. He said no word, only he gazed in dull wonder at his hands. When all was ready for the start McMurtry came over to him.

"You comin' out with us?" he inquired. Conroy shook his head.

"Better git your money for the silver," McMurtry insisted. Again Conroy shook his head, and said slowly:

"I don't want that money. Seems like I wouldn't enjoy it now. You better keep it."

The sheriff laughed understandingly.

"I'll tell the factor to keep it for ye," he said. "We all are obliged to you for riddin' us of a nuisance."

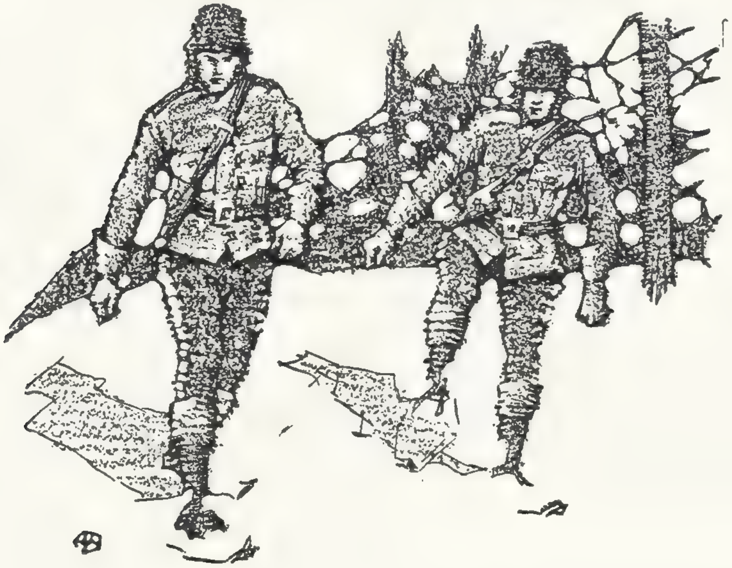
With gruff farewells, the party started off down-river. Conroy gazed after the retreating forms until they were swallowed up in the flying whiteness. Then he turned and walked heavily to the cabin. He lighted a fire and boiled some water. He reached down the tea canister from the shelf, opened it, and measured out one teaspoonful into a cup. He started to measure out a second. Suddenly he stopped, stared at the tea, dropped it and sat down heavily in his chair. Again he looked uncomprehendingly at his hands.

He gazed around the empty cabin. All was silent, save for the quiet, mysterious whispering of the snow-flakes on the roof. Outside, the great spruces seemed to dip their branches toward him in understanding sympathy. Then an engulfing wave of misery and loneliness swept over him, and he threw himself upon his bunk and wept great, racking sobs.

After a time he calmed down and was silent. He lay there, turning over in his mind the events of the last two days. Slowly he adjusted his world once more upon its old basis of calm simplicity. Wethers, he decided, had been no partner at all, but just a crazy, humpbacked crook. Therefore he had done well to kill him.

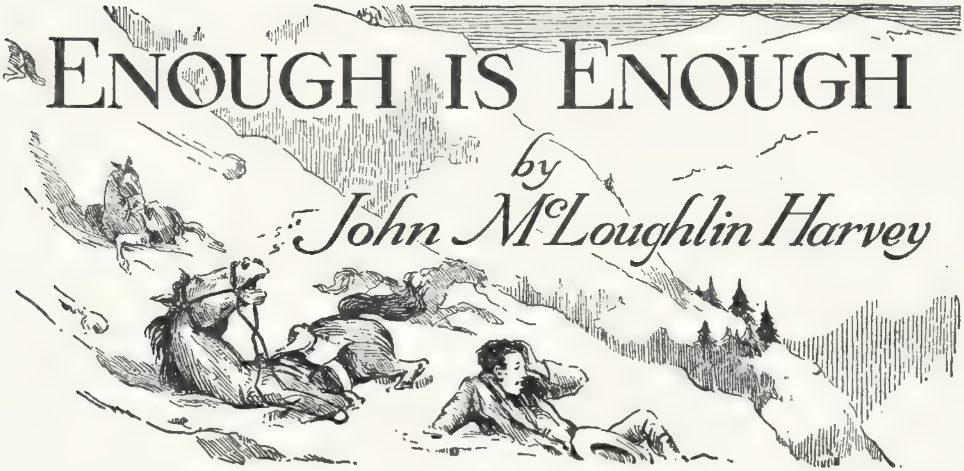
When he had settled this well in his conscience, and his mind had digested it, Conroy's eyelids began gradually to droop.

As he drifted off to sweet, refreshing sleep, his last thought was that old Ben Saunders would be back next Winter. He was a real partner. The giant's heart thrilled with a little glow of pride, and as he slept his face was the face of a tired, contented child.



ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

by John McLoughlin Harvey



LONG before daylight the little camp at the Granite Basin Mine was astir. Lights gleamed from the windows of the cook-shack, the bunk-house and the packers' cabin. Lanterns flashed and moved about in the corral, where the muffled pounding of hoofs in snow arose and mingled with the profane remarks of the wranglers as they struggled with cinches and lashed the packs on vicious, half-broken horses.

The dim light of early morning crept slowly down over the eastern ridges, revealing the basin's rugged, encircling walls and the dark little cluster of cabins nestled in its snow-mantled bowl. By the time it was sufficiently light to see distinctly, the Granite Basin Mining Company's twenty pack-horses stood in a long row at the hitching rail, saddled and loaded, ready for the trail.

The two packers, Dave Bradley and young Steve Mason, finished their breakfast and sauntered over to the corral, to be met at the bars by Jeff Rand, the superintendent.

"Morning, boys," was Rand's greeting.

"Mornin', Jeff."

Bradley paused with one hand uplifted to test the breeze.

"Bad day to risk the ponies on that trail, Jeff," he warned. "Feel them little puffs of warm air? Chinook startin' up, sure as shootin'."

Rand glanced uneasily at the lead-gray sky.

"Boys, I sure hate to send you out, the way things look — but, by ——, this is sure a case of 'have to.' "

He lowered his voice so the wranglers could not overhear.

"Now just keep this under your hats, boys—there can't be another pay-day in the camp until we get the smelter returns from this shipment. We're broke—plenty of good rock in the mine, but no cash in the treasury. There's forty sacks of hand-sorted high-grade in this load you're taking down today—four thousand dollars' worth, all told. It may be tough going, but for Cripes' sake, boys, get the stuff through! Get half of it through if you can't do any better—even that'd pull us through our present troubles, and with a safe margin to spare."

Bradley extended a hard, calloused hand to Rand.

"We'll do our darndest, Jeff."

"That goes for me, too," Mason added quietly.

The two packers saddled their own riding animals. The corral bars were lowered, and amid shouts of the wranglers the packed horses were led, dragged and driven one by one through the gate and strung out down the trail, Mason riding at the head of the line, setting the pace.

A chorus of laughing farewells and warnings followed him, and he waved his hat in careless reply. When the last ore-laden animal had passed out, Bradley climbed into his saddle with a brief "So long!" to Rand, and rode away at the rear of the long line of bobbing, swaying packs.

A little later they emerged from Granite Basin's narrow outlet high upon the west wall of Thunder River Gorge, far above timber-line, with the river a sheer mile below. For miles after that the trail skirted the rugged cañon wall, snow-covered slopes rising steeply above them to far, glaciered heights.

Bradley rode with keen eyes scanning the line ahead, watching for tilting loads—for a shifted pack means at least a galled back, and possibly a seance of bucking that ends in stampede and disaster. Before the first hour had passed, a chinook—the soft, warm breath of the Pacific, sweeping inland—was sighing down from the ridges above him. Before its magic touch the snow far down on the lower slopes vanished and the deeper mantle in the higher regions began to thaw at a rate beyond belief.

Countless cascades, newly born in melting drifts, descended dizzy slopes from snow-fields to timber-line—feathery ribbons of white that vanished and were lost in dark forests below. Every little gulch crossing the trail became a foaming torrent. The sullen booming of Thunder River rose from the depths, mingling and blending in rhythmic beats with the fainter roar of the distant, swollen White Water.

Early in the forenoon it commenced to rain—first in scattered drops, then a deluge. The riders donned their slickers, turned down the brims of their hats, and made the best of it. After an hour of this the trail became a ditch filled with watery slush, through which the horses splashed, stumbled and floundered with their heavy loads.

The air grew sultry as the hours passed, the rain increased in violence, and progress became more difficult. Packs shifted frequently, necessitating a halt of the entire train while they were righted and the cinches tightened.

A little before noon the trail entered upon a small bench on the mountain side, and Mason halted the leaders. Bradley kept the rest of the train moving ahead until the animals were bunched on the level patch of snow.

"——, what a trail!" he grumbled to Mason as the latter joined him. "No bottom to it at all!"

"It sure is pretty soft," Mason admitted. "Couldn't well be any harder going for the cayuses. Look at 'em, Dave. Darn near all in, every one of 'em, right now!"

"They sure are," Bradley agreed, filled with pity for the heaving, lathered animals. "Steve, I hate to tackle it, but we've got to unload that ore an' let those poor devils blow for a while. It's a man-size job, but we'll never make Camp Three tonight if we don't."

The unloading took more than a half-hour of hard work, but at last the heavy sacks lay scattered about on the snow. There was nothing for the horses to browse upon, and the weary animals, now burdened only with pack-saddles and empty alforjas, stood miserably about in varying attitudes of dejection; backs humped, heads drooping dispiritedly.

The two men, seated on ore-sacks, ate their cold, soggy sandwiches in silence. A warm wind was rising, and the driving rain lashed their oilskins noisily.

"Steve, I don't like the looks of things one little bit," Bradley announced gloomily when he had finished.

"This is sure the biggest thaw this here Cascade Range has ever seen, or I miss my guess. This soft top-snow is soakin' up the rain like a sponge, and meltin' like Billy-be——. Look at this."

He kicked the snow at his feet.

"Slush! If this rain don't let up pretty soon—well, you know what's goin' to happen."

"Sure I know. She'll slide like —— an' then some!"

"You bet she'll slide! I tell you what, boy—I wish we were past the Shoulder right now, an' the outfit trailin' along all safe and sound down below timber-line. Steve, if we make the White Water tonight without losin' a pony, we'll be in luck."

There was a note of anxiety in his tone and a worried look in his eyes that did not escape his young partner.

"This rain's comin' down too fast to keep it up," Mason declared cheerfully. "She'll rain herself plumb out, at this rate, and quit in an hour or so. The Shoulder's a long ways off yet, Dave—so don't worry about that until we come to it."

Bradley brightened and poked his partner in the ribs.

"You cussed optimist!" he grinned. "Sometimes I'm a heap tempted to lam you. Well, let's load up and vamoose."

The reloading of forty one-hundred pound sacks of ore, and lashing them in place with the cinch-ropes was a wearisome task, handicapped as the men were by working thigh-deep in soft snow. Several of the animals—including Injun—objected strenuously to the operation, adding immeasurably to their difficulties, but it was finished at last and the long line was winding down the trail once more.

The rain continued without let-up, notwithstanding Mason's optimistic prediction to the contrary. Bradley could tell by the labored movements of the loaded horses that even the hoof-packed snow beneath the slush had commenced to soften.

Mason sang as he rode, his exuberant spirit undampened by the pelting rain, and his voice came faintly back to the man in the rear, whose face relaxed in a grin. His thoughts went back to their first meeting, twelve years before, in '98, that had occurred in the soul-trying passage of White Pass, in the Klondike days.

Mason had been singing then, as he toiled upward, burdened with a heavy pack which he later admitted to be a "sure enough man-killer." Side by side, since then, they had faced peril and hardship together through long years on the gold-seeker's trails of all the West, from Alaska to Mexico.

Throughout those years, just as he sang today, Mason had sung his way through toil and danger, trouble and storm, on all the trails of life. His contagious happiness was a part of him, and had cheered and carried his older, more serious partner through many a dark, discouraging day. The tie between them had grown and ripened into something more than a mere partnership—something preeminently deserving the title of brotherhood, so fine, deep and strong was it, and so unshakable.

"He sure is a cheerful, happy-go-lucky cuss, if ever there was one," Bradley mused.

" 'Lindy, 'Lindy, say you'll be mine!"

The words of the song drifted back, faint yet clear, above the splash of rain and hoofs and the sounds of swollen waters.

"I cert'nly never seen his beat. Now what d'you s'pose——"

Bradley's soliloquy and the other's song ended abruptly and simultaneously as both riders turned in their saddles at a sound back along the way they had come—a crescendo of grinding crashes that arose and swelled to a thunderous roar, subsided into lesser, intermittent crashes, and died. Distant mountain walls flung back the echoes, time and time again.

Bradley shook his head dolefully.

"I knew it," he sighed. "Plumb down into the timber that trip."

He waved his hand to Mason in a gesture which might have meant—

"I told you so."

The other, returning the signal with one expressive of contempt and derision, resumed his interrupted rendition of "Lindy," proceeding to the end, which he followed with the melodious strains of "Sweet Adeline."

About the second time that he pined for the fair Adeline a slide went out across the gorge of Thunder River, directly opposite them and less than a mile away. Bradley did not witness its actual beginning, but at the first sound of its passage he reined his horse and watched its mile-long plunge from the crest to the forests below.

Small at first, it swiftly assumed terrifying proportions, and its thunderous crashes drowned the roar of the river. He felt the earth tremble beneath him, while queer, muffled concussions beat upon his ear-drums and violent air-shocks swayed him in his saddle.

The dense mantle of fir and spruce below timber-line failed to check its rush, and down through the timber it swept, a titanic agent of destruction, trailed by vast clouds of eddying snow, until it had cleared a swath a quarter-mile in width to the banks of Thunder River. When the last echoes of the final crash had died, an immense cone-shaped mass of snow and débris lay piled in the bottom of the gorge.

Bradley found himself sitting with clenched teeth and rigid muscles; he relaxed and drew a long breath. He had witnessed slides and slides—but never such a one as this. Even Skyrocket was trembling and flinging his head around in quick, distrustful glances across the gorge.

After that Bradley rode with uneasy upward glances at the far heights above him where the winter's accumulation of snow lay piled twenty to thirty feet deep on the steep slopes.

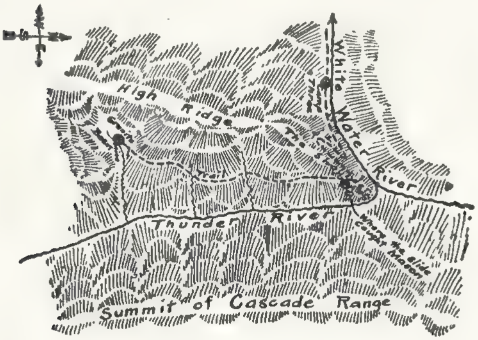
"She'll slide, all right," he predicted. "An' here's hopin' we don't happen to be in the way when she comes."

Looking ahead, he discovered his partner also riding with a watchful eye on the uphill slopes. He waited patiently for the interrupted song to be resumed, but Mason apparently no longer pined for sweet Adeline, and at length Bradley's face lit up with an amused grin.

"Sky, you old pie-biter, what do you know about that!" he ejaculated aloud. "Somethin's got our little pardner's goat at last! We sure never did see anythin' put a muffler on the kid's singin' before. did we, you old son-of-a-gun!"

Skyrocket cocked one ear back at the sound of his master's voice, and at the conclusion wiggled the other in silent assent.

Late in the afternoon they neared Thunder River Shoulder. The Shoulder is an out-jutting spur running down to the junction of Thunder River with the White Water. Avalanche tracks, ages old, scar its flanks. The trail across its bald face and around its sharp crest is in places a mere twelve-inch ledge blasted in solid granite, with a steep, almost sheer, half-mile pitch to the river from its outer edge. Around the point on the down-river side it zig-zags steeply down to timber-line and the comparative safety of flatter slopes.



Bradley had always declared the up-river approach to Thunder River Shoulder the most dangerous piece of winter trail in the Cascade Range, and it had been the setting for many a wild tale he had heard told on winter nights around the roaring stoves of snowbound miners' cabins.

He knew that men and horses had plunged to death down that steep face, and the crags below were strewn with the bones of horses and the wreckage of freight and equipment. Many times on previous trips he had rounded the Shoulder safely, always without mishap—but never under such conditions of snow and weather as prevailed this day.

With vague misgivings he watched his partner ride gingerly out on that slide-swept face, and breathed a sigh of relief when at last he saw him nearing the point. His own turn was yet to come, but his fear was only for his friend and the horses, not for himself.

"Steve's made it all right, anyhow," he breathed thankfully.

AS THOUGH his words had been a signal, a rumble echoed on the heights above. His swift upward glance discovered a slide beginning, which no power on earth could prevent from striking the train. It was not a large slide, but it came with a rush, and there was no time to save the helpless animals in its path. It cut the train just ahead of him, and when it had passed there was a gap in the line where four luckless horses had been before.

Instantly the remainder of the train was in wildest confusion. The two terrified animals to the rear of the slide wheeled and fled by Bradley, back the way they had come, despite his effort to head them; there was scant room, and blind luck alone saved him from being crowded over the edge as they passed.

When he had quieted Skyrocket, his next thought was of his partner, and his first swift glance discovered Mason's peril. He had wheeled his mare to watch the slide, and the snorting, terrified pack-animals had bolted and were crowding upon him, forcing him backward along the trail.

He kept his saddle, the mare struggling bravely to maintain her footing. A pack struck her heavily on the shoulder, and mare, rider, and pack-horse went down. Two others piled upon them, and the struggling mass went over the edge, losing its compactness as it went rolling down the steep slope. The rest of the fear-crazed animals went down the trail in a lumbering, snow-hindered stampede and vanished around the point of the Shoulder.

When Bradley reached the scene of trouble, Mason, unhurt but hatless and plastered with snow, stood beside Blue some twenty yards below the trail, encouraging the mare's efforts to extricate herself.

Just above him the pack-horses plunged and floundered, snorting in terror, almost buried from sight. Mason glanced up at his partner with a laugh.

"Now ain't this one sweet pickle?" he drawled.

"For God's sake, boy, quiet those horses before they start a slide!" Bradley implored, his voice hoarse and strained.

He took the coiled rope from his saddle and flung it down-hill to its fullest length; it failed of reaching its goal by twenty feet.

"——, if I only had a longer rope," he groaned.

"Don't get excited, old-timer," Mason chaffed him coolly.

Apparently quite oblivious to the terrible danger that threatened him, he picked up his hat, carefully brushed the snow from it and placed it on his head; then, with deliberation maddening to the anxious man above, started upwards toward the struggling pack-horses.

There came a sudden, sharp crunching sound, and a long crack appeared in the snow just below the trail. In dumb horror, Bradley watched it widen and the snow below it begin to move—the birth of a slide. The movement swiftly gathered speed. Mason made a run for the safety of the firm snow at the side, a dozen yards away.

Before he had covered half the distance it became impossible to remain erect on the swiftly moving surface. He fell, regained his feet, fell again; then resumed his way on hands and knees in a desperate, floundering crawl. The churning, heaving snow beneath him offered no hold for hand or foot, and at last he abandoned his useless efforts, apparently resigning himself to his fate, resting quietly in a half-kneeling, half-sitting posture.

The wind of his downward rush tore at his hat; he pulled it firmly down upon his head, holding it with one hand, and then waved the other in a farewell gesture to the gray-faced watcher staring down from the trail.

In utter, terrible helplessness Bradley watched him go, and knew the memory of those tragic seconds would haunt him to the end of his days. One by one, man and horses slid over a rounded brink a hundred yards below and passed from view—first Blue, then Mason, and last of all the frantic pack-horses.

They passed from view—and that was all; there was no sound of falling bodies—they vanished into silence profound and terrible; and to Bradley this very silence magnified the horror of the thing a thousandfold.

For ages and ages after that he sat hunched in his saddle, his vacant, grief-stricken stare fastened upon the spot where Mason had disappeared. After a while, scarcely knowing that he did so, he reverently removed his hat. The terrible sense of loss that gripped him stunned him to the uttermost depths of his being.

Steve was gone; the lovable, boyish partner of long years had left him for all time. A sudden appalling vista of the future flashed before him—a partnerless life without Steve—and all the pent-up agony the heart of a strong man can hold burst out in two brief words.

"Oh, God!"

The rain beat down upon his unprotected head until his hair clung to his scalp and forehead in long, wet strings, and little streams of water trickled down his face and neck, unfelt, unheeded. How long he sat there he never afterward knew, but it seemed for years.

A sudden hail in a clear, familiar voice startled him almost out of his senses. He whirled in his saddle scarcely believing his ears and faced fearfully toward the sound. Steve was riding up the trail on Blue—Steve, on whom he believed he had looked his last—not only alive, but wearing his cheerful grin, his hat tilted back on his head at a jaunty angle that to his thunderstruck partner signified that he was well-pleased not only with himself but with all the world.

"For the love of Mike, old-timer, put on your lid." Mason called. "What you doin', anyhow—givin' your dome a shower bath?"

Bradley, amazed beyond belief, sat his horse as though turned to stone, his incredulous gaze fastened upon the approaching rider.

"Put on your hat—you'll catch your deatha cold." repeated Mason sternly as he pulled up beside the other.

Though Bradley complied, he continued to stare with eyes wide, jaw dropped, still dumfounded beyond the power of speech.

"What are you yawpin' at? Why don't you say somethin'?" Mason demanded truculently at last.

"You don't act like you're one bit glad to see me. Maybe you think I'm my own spook. Well, I ain't—if you don't believe me, just feel that," poking Bradley in the ribs, anything but gently.

"Feels sorta hard an' solid for a spook's thumb, don't it now, pardner?"

Bradley reached out suddenly, seized the hand that had poked him and held it in a grip of iron. He tried to speak, but his voice failed. His face twitched and quivered strangely, and his eyes, blurred with tears, looked straight into his comrade's. Mason, for the first time sensing the depth of the other's emotion, sobered at once.

"I take it all back, old-timer. Reckon you're glad to see me, all right. But you're no gladder'n I am to be here instead of—well, where I mighta been."

Bradley found his voice at last.

"Thank God, I won't have to tell Rand what—what I might 'a' had to tell him." he burst out huskily and fervently; and then, his self-possession regained, he volleyed questions in rapid succession.

"How far did it carry you, Steve? Where's the cayuses? How——"

"One at a time, old man." interrupted Mason with a laugh.

"The slide carried us a quarter of a mile or so—and let me tell you right now, that was sure some ride. Dave, I darn near lost my new hat! We slowed up an' stopped in some stunted timber where the slope flattens some on a sort of a bench—an' believe me, old-timer, the jump-off right below that bench is a hair-raiser.

"There's only a little snow in scattered patches down there—this thaw has melted it darn near all away. Blue was out onto bare ground almost as soon as I was, an' nibblin' at a bush, just like nothin' at all had happened—cool as a cucumber."

He leaned forward and patted the mare's neck affectionately.

"An' say, Dave," he continued, "I could see where that other slide crossed that same bench. It never stopped! Those poor broncs went over that jump-off, plumb to the river. It makes me sorta sick to think about it."

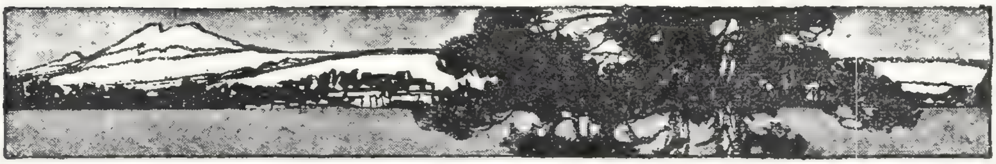
"Where'd you leave the other broncs?"

"Rattler an' Baldy an' Smokey were half-buried, but I got 'em out at last an' took the whole outfit around the point to the trail, a half-mile or so from here. Left 'em tied to a tree. The rest of the string passed along there—I saw their tracks. Guess they're at Camp Three by now. Well, Dave, now you know all about it, so let's go back an' round up those fool cayuses that stampeded up trail."

"Not much we won't!" blazed Bradley hotly. "Darn their fool hides, let 'em find their own way down to Camp Three. Neither you nor me is goin' back along that trail this day! A horse is a horse, but a man's a man! And enough is enough!"

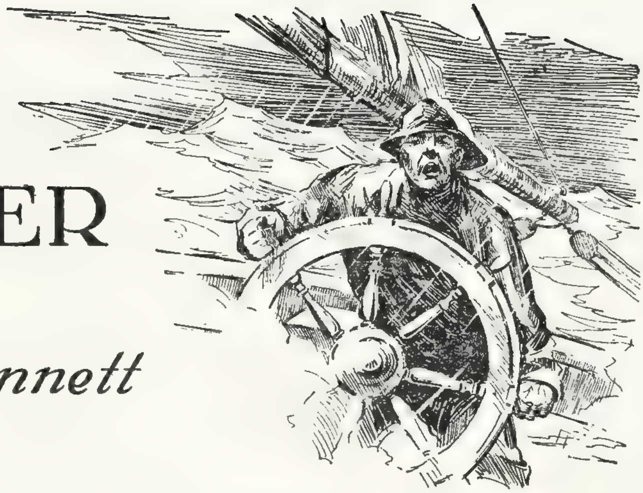
Mason grinned hugely.

"Guess you're right, old-timer. Enough is enough—an' I reckon I've had enough to last me for today, anyhow!"



The BARRIER

by Rolf Bennett



IT IS hard to say just why Port Gifford was essentially characteristic of New England. Perhaps because it was one of those small but quietly prosperous towns on the Connecticut coast where the inhabitants, in addition to the fishing, derived considerable profit from the coasting-trade carried on by small sailing-vessels and steamers. And here, as in most other little towns, everybody knew everybody else, and the business of one was the business of all. A man might keep a secret in New York or Chicago or any other great city, but he certainly would not keep it long if he lived in Port Gifford.

Therefore it was not surprizing that every one in the town knew of the enmity which existed between Bill Hogan, a local pilot, and Captain Larry Craig of the *Gleaner*. That, and the cause of it, was already ancient history in Port Gifford; and only to the stranger within the gates was it necessary to explain that the trouble between them had arisen over a dog. It had been quite an ordinary, commonplace affair, certainly not one calculated to give birth to a venomous hatred that all but terminated in a tragic disaster.

The whole thing was due to the fact that one day Larry Craig had come upon Bill Hogan ill-treating a dirty, half-starved mongrel. Apart from the fact that he loved dogs the genial Irishman detested cruelty of any sort and maybe his tone was a trifle peremptory when he spoke to Bill. Anyway, Bill had resented it, challenged Larry to fight and in a surprizingly short space of time had himself received that particular brand of licking he had promised to bestow on the other.

There, if it had rested with Larry Craig, the matter would have ended. But Bill had been licked in front of his pals and a deadly hatred entered his soul for the man who had done it. Then and there he took oath he'd be quits with Craig, no matter what it cost or how long it took—and Bill Hogan was the sort of man who would keep an oath like that.

Of course, those who knew Bill expected something picturesque and startling to happen almost immediately. But nothing did, though Bill could hardly be blamed for this; it was not his fault that the opportunity for revenge failed to come his way. Still, he was able to vent his spite to some extent in his capacity as pilot.

Whenever he chanced to take the *Gleaner* in or out of harbor, he saw to it that she was delayed as much as possible and that other vessels secured the best berths. But if Captain Craig noticed these things he gave no sign and it looked as if Bill's vendetta, in spite of himself, would fizzle out like a damp firecracker.

Then suddenly, and when most people had forgotten all about it, the little drama of hate reached its long-delayed climax. It happened one evening in late Summer. The day had been oppressively hot and as dusk drew on banks of ugly, leaden-colored clouds began to pile up on the horizon to seaward, advancing steadily until they seemed to cover the whole sky.

"The Barrier," copyright, 1921, by Rolf Bennett

In the pale unnatural light, the sea became a sort of livid gray save where it broke into jets of ghostly white foam against the South Barrier, an ugly reef which lies across the entrance to Port Gifford harbor. And over all lay a great brooding stillness; that terrible, tense hush as if, before breaking into some violent convulsion, Nature were holding her breath.

"My, but she's goin' to be a real ripsnorter when she does come," remarked old Pete Grant, an ex-pilot who, with other seafaring men, stood in an open shed on the water-front watching the gathering storm.

"I wouldn't be outside the Barrier tonight for—" began Chad Parkins, the shipping agent, but stopped as a low, ominous rumble disturbed the uncanny stillness. "There," he added, "it's coming."

There was a pause and all eyes turned seaward whence the sound of approaching thunder had come.

"Say, ain't the *Gleaner* about due, Chad?" asked some one.

"She was due yesterday," answered the agent, "but they've been getting bad weather round the coast, so maybe she's held up. But if she's anywhere about here tonight, I guess Craig will stand out to sea till the storm's past."

Every one glanced instinctively at Bill Hogan, whose duty it would be to bring the *Gleaner* in should she arrive and signal for a pilot.

"You bet he will," declared Bill Hogan confidently. "No skipper'd be such a blamed fool as to try and get past the Barrier with this buster comin' along. It'll be as dark as the inside of a shark's belly in ten minutes."

But old Pete Grant shook his head.

"If he's off the harbor, he'll try to make it," he said. "A bit o' weather don't scare Larry none."

A discussion arose as to whether Craig would dare make the harbor in such a terrific storm as that which now threatened. Meanwhile the sky changed slowly from the dull, leaden hue to a purple-tinted black and the sea took on the color of ink. Outside the Barrier it was growing rough, but inside it the water rose and fell in waveless, oily undulations that denoted a heavy under-swell.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Pete wiping the sweat from his face. "It feels like the whole darned universe was goin' to bust. I ain't felt so——"

He broke off abruptly, silenced by the sound of a steamer's siren calling loud and insistently in the blackness beyond the Barrier.

"It's the *Gleaner* sure!" cried Chad Perkins.

He looked at Bill Hogan, but though the gloom concealed the expression on the pilot's face he could see that it had gone very white. Well, any man might be forgiven for shrinking from putting out on such a night as this to navigate the treacherous South Barrier channel.

But whether he shrank from it or not, Bill Hogan knew that his reputation was at stake and there was only one thing for him to do. Flinging a careless word of farewell to the others he left the little group and made his way to the pilot boat. A few minutes later, the boat was seen moving swiftly toward the harbor mouth, to disappear completely in the enshrouding gloom.

WHAT happened out there in the darkness afterward is best told in the words of Joe Leggard, the quartermaster on duty at the wheel when Bill Hogan took charge of the *Gleaner*. Joe told the story in his own rambling way next morning, putting to flight a whole host of wild rumors which had started to circulate overnight.

"On the homeward trip," began Joe, "we ran into a real sneezer. From the sou'-west it come. And blow! B'gee, it looked like it was going to blow the sticks clear out of the old *Gleaner*. It did that. And the seas, b'gee, they clumb up aft and tumbled over the stern and raced along the decks like they was Niagara Falls. We had to rig hand-lines fore and aft and even they got carried away—just like bits of string, they did.

"Then in the middle watch the skipper got swept off the companion-ladder as he was going on the bridge. That sea took him like a cork, it did, and carried him aft and flung him against the winch and left him there. When we picked him up he'd got a leg broke, besides being stunned. We got him down below and the mate kind of set his leg. And all that day, b'gee, and all the night too, it blew the darndest hurricane ever I see.

"When it was all over and the storm had

spilt itself out, the *Gleaner* looked like sh'd just been raised from the sea bottom. You can see her now in the harbor, a heap of old junk, but handsome to what she was when we come out of that snorter. We patched her up best way we could, but some of the plates had started and she was leakin' in more places than we could count.

" 'I guess she'll last,' says the mate, 'till we reach Port Gifford,' he says, 'and then the sooner she's broke up the better.'

"So we bumped along, pumping like blazes and it looked like we'd make port while the fair weather lasted. Then last night, b'gee, about sundown it come over as black as thunder and we knowed we were in for another buster.

" 'If we don't reach port before it breaks,' says the mate, 'we'll have to stand out.'

"Well, it got darker and darker and the mate sends down to the skipper to ask if he'd stand out to sea and the skipper says no.

" 'She won't stand another hammering,' he says, 'it's port or perdition for us,' he says. 'Let her rip and when you're to windward of the Barrier signal for a pilot.'

"So we kept our course and by the time we were off the Barrier you couldn't see from the bridge to the foc's'le head, that dark it was.

" 'We ain't going to get no pilot tonight,' says the mate. 'We'll be drove out to sea if we ain't washed up on a lee shore, and either way we'll crack up,' says he. 'I wish I'd stayed to home when I was a boy instead of becoming a sailor.'

"Well, he'd hardly done speaking when, b'gee, the pilot boat come alongside and Bill Hogan climbs aboard.

" 'Plumb crazy, ain't you, to try and make the channel with that just about to bust?' says he pointing to the sky. 'Where's the skipper?'

"The mate tells him how the skipper's down with a broken leg, but had given orders we were to make the harbor.

" 'Very good,' says Bill, 'orders is orders. But if we hit the reef, it won't be my fault. You remember that,' says he, 'if you come through alive, which I doubt.'

"So he takes his stand near me by the wheel, one eye cocked on the compass, the other on the ship's bow—or where it ought to be, for it was now that dark you couldn't see more'n a yard ahead. It was so, b'gee.

"So we gets under way, half-speed ahead, and after a while Bill sings out 'Starboard!'

" 'Starboard it is,' says I, putting the wheel over.

" 'Port,' says he.

" 'Port it is,' says I.

"I steadied her and then waited ready to throw the wheel over hard-a-starboard. I'd made that channel dozens of times, as you folks know, and when I'd steadied her after 'port,' it was always 'hard-a-starboard.' A couple of minutes maybe and then came 'port,' which last should swing you clear of the reef.

"Well, I waited, b'gee, and I waited, but Bill didn't say nothing. And I began to feel queer. B'gee, I did that, for I kinder smelt the reef right ahead of us, felt it sort of. Still Bill didn't say nothing and at last I couldn't stand for it no longer.

" 'Did you give hard-a-starboard?' says I.

" 'I did not,' says he and I never heard a man's voice sound uglier. 'When I do, you'll hear it. Keep her as she goes,' says he, 'or I'll boot you off the bridge.'

"I began to wonder if Bill knowed just where he was. I was as sure we were heading straight for the Barrier as I was that we'd go to pieces like an egg-shell if we hit it. But he was the pilot and I was there to take his orders.

" 'Don't you go monkeying with that wheel now,' says Bill suspicious-like.

" 'Aye, aye,' says I, but my heart was in my throat for, b'gee, I was expecting every second we'd pile up.

"Then all of a sudden there was a mighty flash of lightning and Bill Hogan staggered back like some one had hit him. But I wasn't looking at him. No, b'gee, for as long as you might say 'knife,' I was looking straight on to the Barrier where it lay right under our bows with the seas breaking over it. I didn't wait for no orders then. No, siree, I was climbing up that darned wheel like a squirrel, and never in my life did I put a wheel to starboard smarter. A couple more minutes and we'd been on that reef, good and hard. And with heavy seas breaking over to one side and a swift undertow on the other, we'd have been pounded into mush in less'n no time. Yes, b'gee, there'd have been some widows and orphans this morning but for that flash o' lightning.

"Suddenly I heard Bill's voice and it sounded sort of strained and unnatural.

" 'You ain't altered the course, have you?' he shouts, and before I could answer he was bending over the compass.

"'Them blamed binnacle lamps have gone out,' says he. 'Fetch a light, some one.'

"I could see the compass well enough, but the mate takes out his pocket flash and switches it on the card so's you could see the smallest markings.

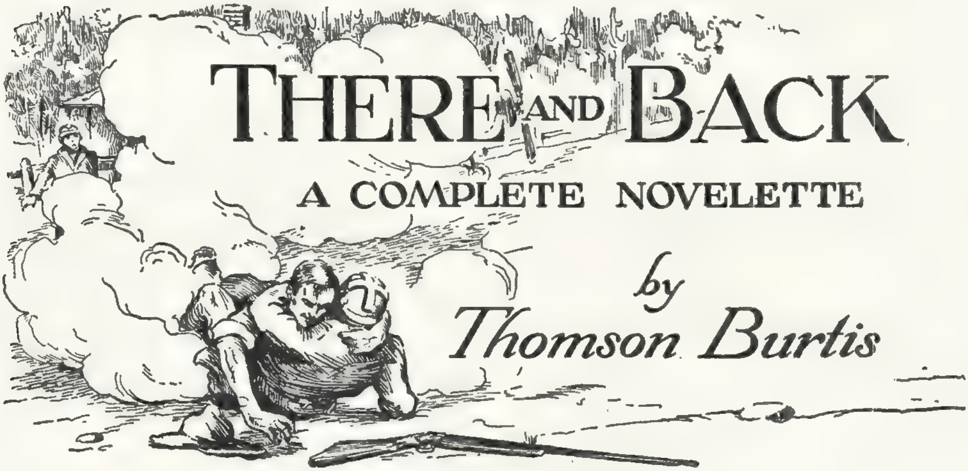
"'Ain't no one aboard this gol-darned boat got a light!' yells Bill.

"Just like that he said it and with the compass card in front of him as clear as daylight. 'Ain't no one aboard this gol-darned boat got a light!' says he."

Here Joe Leggard, aware that the climax of his story had been reached, paused and looked at the strained faces of his listeners.

"'Cording to the way I figger it out," he went on presently, "Bill Hogan meant to pile us up on the reef because of what he had against the skipper. He hated the skipper that much, he didn't care nothing for his own life or anybody else's, so long as he got quits. I can't explain it no otherwise. But it was a mighty lucky thing that the flash of lightning which struck Bill Hogan stone blind put me wise to the danger just in time.

"It was a close call," he added. "It was that, b'gee!"



THERE AND BACK

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by
Thomson Burtis

Author of "The Winning Chance," "Vengeance," etc."

A LOUD and succulent smack, caused by the sudden stoppage of a lustily thrown slipper by the beaverboard walls of his boudoir, disturbed the noisy slumbers of George Arlington Hemingwood, shavetail, only slightly. His mouth opened and closed feebly. A deep sigh, and he was again immersed in repose.

"Come on, 'Duke'!" yelled Captain Kennard from his bedroom, across the sitting-room of the quarters. "The ham and eggs are ca-a-alling me!" he finished in an unmusical bellow.

"I am always deaf in the morning," yawned Hemingwood, coming to a sitting posture and blinking owlishly at the slipper which was Captain Kennard's invariable messenger of wakefulness.

"The other slipper, aimed more carefully, follows anon, Duke."

"That's the worst of sleeping in an exposed position," grumbled Hemingwood as he climbed out of bed. "The lack of privacy around here is positively indecent."

"Oh I was drunk last night, drunk the
night before.
Gonna get drunk tonight if I never get
drunk any more!
When I'm drunk I'm happy as can be——"

The nerve-racking series of discords trailed into silence gradually, denoting the progress of the captain toward the shower-baths. Thither George Arlington Hemingwood—"of the Hemingwoods of Bahston, y'know"—followed him, his wiry form swathed in a huge bath-towel.

"My eagle eye tells me that it's foggy out again this morning," announced Hemingwood, taking a brief glance into the bathroom mirror to see if his carefully cherished black mustache had sprouted any further during the night.

"Uh-huh," chattered the stocky, thickset captain, dancing under an ice-cold shower.

"Some of these days it's going to be clear enough so that we can handle an artillery shoot without being in danger of getting hit with a shell," pursued the Duke, so called as a tribute to the mustache.

He stripped for action, plunged beneath the shower and out again as quickly as was humanly possible.

"Being hit with a friendly shell is about the only thing that hasn't happened to you in your career as a flier, isn't it?" grinned the captain as he sawed at himself with a rough towel.

Tall, blond Curran entered the shower-room in a dazzling bathrobe. He had reported to the Air Service Detachment the day before from May Field, California.

"Is the Duke one of these hard-luck birds?" he inquired as he got into action with a shaving-brush.

"Did you ever read O. Henry's yarn about Kearney and Phœbe?" countered the captain.

"What made you think he could read?" inquired Hemingwood.

"Well, the Duke is in the same class as Kearney for hard luck," pursued the captain as he prepared to depart.

"By George, you're right about the fog," remarked the C. O. later as he was in process of dressing.

"Thick as cream, but maybe it'll be high enough to let us shoot. This artillery bunch can't savvy the various reasons that prevent us from arising into the ozone and——"

"Raw, raw, raw, Ha-avahd," interrupted Hemingwood rudely. "I haven't heard so much English spread since I went through Harvard——"

"One afternoon and came out with three overcoats," the captain finished for him.

Patton, an incurable early bird, strolled into the sitting-room.

"A little speed," he exhorted, tilting his Stetson on the back of his curly black head.

"If the captain would stop trying to be witty perhaps I could control my hysterical mirth enough to dress," returned Hemingwood, surveying the part in his sleek black hair appraisingly.

His good-humored face was very brown—most of the officers of the temporary detachment of fliers at Camp Henry had come up from the Mexican border patrol, he among them—and a pair of merry brown eyes looked forth at the world with a careless challenge in them.

"Who shoots today?"

"The Duke and Beaman. Curran will carry an artilleryman up to get a view of the works. I surely hope this first shoot of ours goes off well."

"You're taking a chance, sending the Duke up, aren't you?"

"Just daring the gods to do their worst at the start," admitted the captain, emerging from the sanctity of his bedroom fully clothed.

"The bedbug has no brains at all, but he gets there just the same," caroled the Duke.

There was practically no mishap in flying that he had not experienced, but somehow or other he always got through. He had had more outlandish adventures as a flier than any three men had a right to have, and the bad luck that haunted him was a standing joke to every one who knew him. Hemingwood had no respect for ships or flying—he possessed a vast belief in the fact that he would wiggle through somehow. His creed was to open-'er-up and go ahead regardless.

"Hustle up and let's go. Curran! Nearly ready?" bawled Patton.

"Just a minute," came Curran's voice from the upper regions of the barracks, which had been changed into bachelor officers' quarters.

"Did you ever hear about George's fund of information about motors?" inquired the captain as he perched on the edge of a desk to await the rest of the bachelor contingent.

"Don't believe I have. It's not very vast, is it?" grinned Patton.

"Vast enough," Hemingwood cut in. "I know where the throttle and park are—what more does a peelote need to know?"

"We got a phone call from him one day at McMullen, saying that he had had a forced landing fifty miles south of San Antonio. He said the motor had cut dead—his massive brain had realized that almost in a flash, as it were——"

"Your sarcasm is as light and fleecy as——"

"Shut up, Duke. Anyway he said that probably it was ignition trouble on account of the motor having cut dead. So we sent a ship that two hundred miles with a repair kit, only to find that the crankshaft had broken in the motor, and George never knew it!"

"Here comes Curran. Let's forget this jealousy—this kidding of the best pilot that ever came from Beacon Hill," said Hemingwood, sauntering down the hall with his characteristic, bent-kneed stride.

The car was waiting on the road in front of the quarters. To the right, on a line with the officers' domicile, stretched the barracks and mess-halls of the hundred enlisted men of the detachment. To the left was Headquarters, the garage, machine-shop and warehouse. In the rear line were the photographic and radio huts, as well as some miscellaneous shacks used for various purposes. The field was directly across the road, the four big hangars paralleling the road itself and forming the western boundary of the field.

A tall, gangling sergeant was walking up the road. He saluted grudgingly.

"Seeing Sergeant Woodruff reminds me —the general won't have his aerial pictures of the big review tomorrow unless this mist is lighter than it is this morning," remarked the captain as he took the wheel and started the engine.

"Oh, the noble sarge would have the camera messed up anyhow," said Hemingwood carelessly.

"The next time he falls down there's going to be trouble," stated the captain, ominously serious.

Then conversation became impossible.

"I believe the C. O. has liquor stored," said Patton as a bump lifted his big form two feet in the air.

"He doesn't want the eggs at the club to get any older before we eat 'em," was Curran's diagnosis.

At twice the speed allowed by Post Regulations, Camp Henry, the car shot down the concrete road which split the big, sprawling artillery camp squarely in two. A Kentucky morning when the climate is really working smoothly is worthy the attention of a connoisseur of mornings, and despite the mist the beauty of the day was calculated to make any man start work on the right foot. To the men from sun-baked Texas it was like Paradise to see some regular trees and feel cool air in their faces.

At forty miles an hour they shot past long lines of army buildings, skidded around a corner in a manner that caused several artillerymen to wax pop-eyed, and drew up before the big Officers' Club in a burst of dusty glory.

They joined Mr. and Mrs. Beaman for breakfast. Jim Beaman, although rather young to be trusted with a family, had a most charming wife, and his two-year-old daughter Jerry—short for Geraldine—was easily the most popular resident of the club.

Hemingwood paused to tickle the delighted Jerry before he sat down, which invariable habit of his always aroused much glee in the bosom of the blond little sprite who was the officially adopted mascot of the detachment. The artillerymen and their wives who were breakfasting at near-by tables nodded at the airmen with friendly smiles. Mrs. Hawkley, who was on the false-teeth side of fifty, gave Hemingwood a particularly winning smile. Somehow or other she had found out that he was of the Hemingwoods of Bahston.

"Captain Kennard, I wish you'd call Jim down for me," laughed Beaman's diminutive better half. "Look what I found on the club bulletin-board this morning."

The captain ceased his efforts to dodge the squirting juice of his none too well cut grapefruit long enough to read aloud the crumpled paper Mrs. Beaman handed him.

Notice.

Please do not buy Jerry Beaman any more candy or pop. I get little enough sleep as it is.

James Beaman.

"Attaboy, Jim. Don't let the artillery get too familiar with the women folks," chuckled Hemingwood.

"My measures are direct and to the point," returned Beaman with a grin. "Is it too foggy out to take pictures on the mosaic today, captain?"

"Yes. I'm hoping we won't have to disappoint the general tomorrow on those pictures of the review he's set his heart on. We can do the mosaic of the reservation any time, but bad weather will crab those review pictures to a fare-you-well."

"Which will disappoint the general sadly, and cause his already low opinion of the Air Service to sink lower," said Patton.

"I'm more scared of Sergeant Woodruff

than I am of the weather," stated Beaman, who in addition to being an observer acted as adjutant.

The captain's thoughts had Sergeant Woodruff as a subject for the remainder of the meal. The non-com. had arrived in charge of a photographic detachment, the taking of a mosaic of Camp Henry and its big artillery range being part of the duty for which the fliers had been sent. He had served as an officer during the war, and it had gone to his head. Being totally without education, and having made a none-too-brilliant record as an officer, he was not retained in the commissioned ranks.

His know-it-all attitude and firm belief that he was to be allowed to make his own hours speedily caused the vigorous captain to call his hand. The first attempt was not too successful, but the next call-down the lanky, conceited non-com. received contained all the picturesque verbiage and undeniable force which the stocky little C. O. possessed.

The sergeant came to work on time thereafter, but there came to be an increasing number of reasons why the photographic detachment could not do its work. The big cameras were out of order—the electric batteries which ran them mysteriously lost their juice—the carefully flown strips always showed huge gaps in them. And the worst of the matter was that not an officer in the outfit possessed knowledge of photography enough actually to prove that the sergeant was to blame, although sundry suspicions were entertained.

However, there was plenty of time to take the mosaic—the detachment still had two months of duty to perform with the artillery regiments. The matter of the air-pictures of the review the next day was important—important to a greater degree than would seem possible.

It was to be a mammoth affair, with the opening games of the polo tournament and various other matters connected with it. The commanding general of the department—a candidate for the Presidency—was to be there. And the white-haired brigadier-general who commanded Camp Henry had set his heart on having a complete set of aerial views of the tremendous review.

The captain's mind roved back to the interview he had had with Colonel Feldmore, department Air Service officer, down in San Antonio just before the detachment's departure.

"Kennard, this thing is important as ——," the tall, spare chief had told him. "The rest of the army thinks the Air Service is made up of a lot of wild kids who are good for nothing at all except to grandstand. They give 'em credit for guts, and admire 'em for that reason, but they don't think the fliers are worth a tinker's —— for any actual work, or that the airplanes can accomplish anything practical.

"This picked detachment is being sent at the artillery's request to handle artillery shoots during the firing season. It's up to you to prove to that bunch what we can do, and have been doing along the border and in other places. Every man you've got has been selected for a reason—your pilots are veterans and you've got two of the best observers in the army in Beaman and Gravesend.

"Make their eyeballs click up there, and go more than half-way. Grandstand to make an impression if necessary, but knock 'em dead. When they hit a target they can't see on the second salvo they'll open their peepers wide. Go to it, son, and tell those wild youngsters of yours what's ahead of 'em."

And the colonel's words were true. The big artillery camp was friendly, but the occasional good-humored jests regarding the temperamental fliers and the amount of work which the Air Service did *not* have to do had been straws showing which way the wind blew. Camp Henry, knowing nothing of flying, was not in a position to appreciate the fact that fogs and fields and quality of oil and gasoline were all vital matters; that flying a shoot ten miles out on the range meant the staking of two lives against the motor, for in the mountains of Kentucky landing prospects are exactly as safe as over New York City.

If the detachment fell down on the pictures for the general it would mean considerable damage to the prestige of the airmen. The captain had no doubts as to the outcome of the artillery spotting—the first try at that was to come this morning—although he hated to see Hemingwood and Beaman go up in that fog. He was worried, however, about those insignificant yet psychologically important pictures on the morrow. Sergeant Woodruff, to his mind, was about as trustworty as an umbrella in a whirlwind.

As he guided the car, now overloaded by the addition of Gravesend and Beaman, the married observers, he decided to interview Woodruff immediately. There must be no possible slip-up in the arrangements for the pictures.

He stopped the car in front of Headquarters, the drone of warming Liberty motors behind the hangars signifying that the mechanics on the line had everything in readiness for the shoot. Hemingwood and Beaman went directly to the line.

"Tell Sergeant Woodruff I want to see him immediately," the C. O. told the orderly.

He stood by the window of the office and watched Hemingwood's De Haviland take off in that small, dangerous field. The pilot held his ship close to the ground, picking up extra speed as it soared for the line of stables that rimmed the southern edge of the hilly cow-pasture dignified by the title of Goddard Field. In a steep chandelle the big ship turned and climbed.

The sun struck fire from the wireless antenna and fish which Beaman was unwinding. The ship circled the airdrome two or three times, while Beaman tested his radio. When the wireless sergeant put out the panels which meant "I understand" in front of the radio hut, the ship headed eastward toward the artillery range where a regiment of artillery was awaiting them. At a thousand feet the ship showed only dimly through the mist.

DID you wish to see me, sir?' The captain turned to face the extremely tall, stooping, photographic man. He sat down behind his desk and lit a cigaret.

"I just wanted to ask you regarding your preparations for the review pictures tomorrow. There must be no slip-up. Are your cameras and batteries ready?"

Woodruff's eyes were on the floor.

"I think they will be," he said at length.

"You think they will be!" exploded the captain. "—— it, aren't they all right now?"

"Well, sir, I'm not sure yet,"mumbled the non-com.

The captain's clenched fist struck the desk with force enough to overturn the standing desk-lamp. It was a physical outlet for the wrath which Woodruff always aroused in him. His words, however, were ominously slow and quiet.

"When did I tell you to be absolutely certain that you were in readiness for this mission tomorrow?"

"Why—er——"

"Two days ago. What the —— have you been doing since then? The weather has made it impossible to do any air work—how has your valuable time been occupied?"

The sergeant licked his lips with his tongue. Apparently he had rather lost his nerve. There was an underlying spirit in Captain Kennard's attitude which was new, and it gave the non-com. pause. He now wished he had not done what he had.

"I'm waiting to hear your explanation, Woodruff," came the captain's level voice.

"I—I've been pretty busy trying to piece together the mosaic—"

"Didn't I order you to let that go, and instead to check up all your equipment and supplies?"

"I don't think so."

"You're a liar by the clock!" snapped the captain viciously. "You're coming with me right now and satisfy me that everything is in readiness."

The non-com's eyes lifted to the set face of his commanding officer, and what he saw there was not comforting. Nevertheless the plunge had to be made, and it would do no good to postpone it.

Woodruff was a weak character—his method of signifying his dislike was to become a human wrench in the machinery. There was not force and initiative enough in all his lazy, conceited life to cause him to use any but safe, underhanded means.

"There is no sulfuric acid for the camera battery, captain," he almost whispered.

The stocky little C. O. laid down his Stetson slowly.

"Didn't Hemingwood tell me that there was two quarts of acid in the photo hut?" he inquired slowly.

"There was, but last night it—leaked out."

"Oh, it did. So more has to be gotten from Dayton before we can take pictures, eh?"

The quietness of the words gave Woodruff hope. He had thought it would be such an excellent scheme to prevent the taking of those important pictures on the morrow—he knew how important the captain considered them. He had not intended to mention the acid until later, but the fog would prevent going after a new supply.

"Yes, sir," he replied, his downcast eyes on the hat which he was twirling nervously.

"Woodruff, there are several things which are apparent to me. In the first place, you're afraid of flying. That has been noticeable. In the second place, you hit Goddard Field with the idea that you were a combination of Pershing and the Encyclopedia Britannica, and when your ideas of staying in bed until nine o'clock and working as little as possible were shattered you have been deliberately holding us up in every way in your power. You have been a gold-brick and a useless loafer. Orderly!"

The orderly jumped at the captain's raised voice, and came into the office.

"Go to the photographic hut and get Brown," ordered Kennard.

"Here's what you're going to do, Woodruff," went on the captain, his gray eyes cold and his mouth set. "But I guess I'll wait until Brown gets here, to tell you."

Woodruff was at a loss. Matters did not look to be in a very comforting state as far as he was concerned. Apparently he had gone just a bit too far. He stood quietly, his stoop-shouldered form hunched forward farther than usual and his eyes on the floor. Occasional far-away booms from the big guns which Beaman and Hemingwood were controlling out there on the range ten miles away reached the ears of the two men in the office, and once in a while a window rattled as a whole battery fired a salvo.

In a moment Brown entered. He was a fresh-faced, youthful chap who was, next to Woodruff, the highest ranking man in the photo detachment.

"Brown, you could take charge of the photographic work if necessary, couldn't you?" demanded Kennard without preamble.

"Yes, sir," was the prompt response.

"What happened to the sulfuric acid that was in stock for the batteries?"

The corporal glanced briefly at Woodruff.

"I don't know, sir. It's all gone."

"Were there any signs of leakage?"

"Yes, sir. We keep it in a little outside cupboard, you know, so that in case of a leak it would drop on the ground. The bottle was cracked and it had all dropped to the ground through the open-work shelf we kept it on."

"I see. And you have no idea how the jar could have cracked?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I have. I am not satisfied with Woodruff's work anyhow. Starting right now, you are in charge of all photo work. Woodruff, you're a fatigue sergeant. Your days of ease are over.

"That sulfuric acid has got to be procured from Dayton today. With this fog it's a —— of a trip. If Hemingwood doesn't object to going after it he will go, because he's the only man in the outfit that has flown the course before. If he doesn't want to go—and I won't blame him if he doesn't—I'll go myself. And you, Woodruff, will be the passenger on the trip, whoever goes."

Woodruff said nothing. He was afraid of flying—not badly enough to make him want to give up the juicy extra pay which it meant, but still uncomfortable a few thousand feet above the earth. The thought of that flight through the fog to Dayton, two hundred miles, made his yellow heart beat like a trip-hammer, but the captain's next sentence prevented him from registering his dislike for the trip.

"If you renig on the trip—which by Army Regulations you can—you will be courtmartialed for carelessness and neglect of duty, and those sergeant's stripes will come off your sleeve. I ought to do it anyhow. In view of the fact that it is your carelessness—to put it charitably—which has made this trouble and danger necessary, and in view also of the fact that you are on flying duty, it is your place to go along and procure just the stuff needed. Therefore I have no compunction in presenting the alternative to you. Which will you choose?"

Woodruff was silent and cringing.

"Answer me!" snapped the captain.

"I—I'll go," said Woodruff sullenly.

The captain glanced at his wristwatch.

"Hemingwood will be down in a few minutes. You will be ready to accompany whoever goes in half an hour. Orderly!"

"Yes, sir," and Private White hurried in.

"Order Sergeant Decker to have my ship warmed and ready to go on a trip to Dayton in half an hour. Also to have plenty of gas and oil immediately available for Lieutenant Hemingwood's ship when he comes down. Either ship may go."

The orderly sped out to the line with his orders.

"That's all, Woodruff. You've come —— close to cutting your throat this trip, and by —— the next time I have trouble with you it will be no flying pay and a private's life for yours. Understand me?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Woodruff.

He saluted and walked out, his long legs moving slowly.

"Brown, you understand the importance of there being no slip-up tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir. If we get that sulfuric everything'll be O. K., sir," returned the corporal confidently.

"It had better be," was the grim reply.

MEANWHILE Hemingwood and Beaman were hard at work. As soon as a thousand feet showed on the altimeter it was apparent that fifteen hundred feet would be the maximum altitude at which they could work, which was rather low.

They headed out across the hilly, thickly wooded range, picking up the white signal panel of the artillery in a small open spot in the woods. Four batteries of four guns each were easily discernible, placed at different points within a radius of a few hundred yards of the panel.

Beaman picked a target—in the first case an abandoned barn. He sent his wireless messages swiftly, giving the artillery the approximate range of the target, which they could not see. Hemingwood circled it to give them a chance to get an approximate sighting for deflection—then the long dashes which meant "Fire" flashed from the De Haviland's radio. The pilot strove to keep his ship in such a position that the target was easily observed, which is far harder than it might seem to the uninitiated. To make matters more difficult, the ground was dim below the smoky screen of fog.

Beaman was standing in the rear cockpit, his eyes on the guns. In a few seconds four red flashes shot from their mouths, and the young observer's eyes shifted toward the target. Four white puffs signified the location of the shots.

Before the smoke had drifted away he had mentally estimated the center of the four shells, and then the range and deflection corrections. In the complicated code which the army uses he sent down the information that all four shots were observed, that the range was two hundred yards short and the deflection 500 yards to the left. It was wireless operating raised to the *n*th degree of skill—the roar of the motor made it impossible to use the ear as an aid in sending, which makes much difference; he was sending code and not words which made sense; and the failure to send correctly an individual letter or numeral would mean the loss of time and valuable ammunition.

Adjustment after adjustment was made, target after target demolished. Sometimes it took eight rounds, sometimes only two. Beaman was like some gnome of the upper regions in his ceaseless activity. He had only one hook of his belt attached to the ship, leaving him more freedom of movement. Sometimes he was lying flat on the fuselage, the better to see the shots.

One hand was always on his sending-lever, no matter whether he was leaning far over the side, riding on the fuselage or standing on the stool in the back to get good observation. His eyes never left the wooded, rugged ground fifteen hundred feet below, and all his mentality was concentrated on the instantaneous estimates of distance necessary, and the necessity of absolutely accurate radio sending. To all practical purposes he was commanding a regiment of artillery.

Finally all four batteries had fired, and with a sigh of weariness he sank back on the stool. His legs ached from ceaseless bracing against the air-stream.

As Duke throttled down and sent the De Haviland diving for the wooded and scarred wilderness below, Jim hastily wrote a note, giving the targets which had been fired at that day and details as to the extent of the demolition. He enclosed this note in a weighted message-bag.

Like a monstrous bird of prey the ship shot downward toward the artillery field headquarters. It was skimming the tops of the trees with the air-speed meter registering an even hundred and fifty miles an hour as they flashed across the panel. Hemingwood lifted his ship upward in a climbing turn that was almost an upward sideslip, due to their speed. As he did so Beaman dropped the bag, which fell only a few yards from the interested artillerymen.

Hemingwood straightened out and sent his plane toward the field. There was only one possible way to land—northward—for the hillside called Goddard Field was on a steep slope, and an up-hill landing was the only possible method, regardless of the wind. He circled back over Camp Henry, side-slipped over the last row of stables and trees, and straightened out a few feet above the ground. They landed smoothly, and the slope of the hill killed their speed quickly, Hemingwood cutting one switch and retarding the spark to reduce the motor pull to a minimum.

"Captain Kennard wants to see you, sir," the orderly yelled in Hemingwood's ear before he had run out the gas.

After cutting the switches Hemingwood lost no time in reporting.

"How did the shoot go?" inquired the captain.

"Good—five rounds was about the average, I guess, but we knocked the targets galley west."

"I'm glad of that," stated the relieved C. O. "Hemingwood, what do you say to a trip to Dayton and back today?"

"What's the occasion?" inquired the surprized Hemingwood.

The captain told him concisely.

"You're the only man who has made the trip," he concluded, "and it won't be any cinch unless this fog lifts. However, I'll leave it up to you as to whether you go or not."

"Oh, I'd just as soon go," was the careless reply. "So the sergeant is going along, is he?"

The captain grinned.

"And he isn't looking forward to it a bit, either," he replied. "For Heaven's sake be careful though, Duke. I don't like the idea of carrying sulfuric acid on a ship. Better go a long ways out of your way to make sure of good fields in case of a forced landing—a crack-up with that acid——"

"Might be uncomfortable," agreed Hemingwood, lighting a cigaret. "When do we start?"

"As soon as your ship is ready. They're filling it now."

Woodruff's gangling form could be seen slowly proceeding toward the line. He carried helmet and goggles.

"Is the fog lightening?"

"Maybe the fog is, but the clouds seem to be getting lower all the while," said Beaman. "I'm glad I'm not going."

The captain paced the office for a moment. The sunshine which had been filtering through the mist was gone—apparently it was low clouds more than fog now that darkened the earth.

"Don't worry, cap'n," said Duke blithely. "We've got to get those pictures, the clouds are plenty high enough, and there's no reason to get wall-eyed over the trip."

From the Duke's point of view the mission was a matter of course. He was absolutely unruffled by any abnormal conditions in flying.

"Well, go ahead, George," said the captain at length. "But don't take any foolish chances. Those pictures aren't worth a crack-up."

Hemingwood strolled to the line, where his motor was already being tested. Scudding clouds seemed to be just escaping the tops of the low mountains a few miles away. They looked to be several hundred feet lower than they had been fifteen minutes before. There was a fairly strong wind likewise.

The pilot looked at Woodruff's sour face with a grin on his own brown countenance.

"After you get through with this jaunt you'll never let sulfuric leak again, sergeant," he stated.

Woodruff did not reply. He had already regretted that incident to the bottom of his heart; in trying to bother Captain Kennard he had slung a boomerang.

"Climb in," ordered Duke when Sergeant Decker finally nodded that everything was O. K.

"I—I don't think we ought to go in this weather," said Woodruff hesitantly.

His face showed a little white beneath the tan.

"Don't you? We've got to get those pictures, and this time you're not running the works," stated the pilot.

He carefully tested each switch, and studied his instrument-board more carefully than was his wont. An air-line to Dayton would carry him for a hundred miles over the wild mountain country. It never entered his head to follow the Ohio River to Cincinnati, which would be the safest route, although longer.

He taxied to the top of the hill, close to the trees which bounded the northern edge of the field. He fed the throttle to the engine, and held his big ship a few feet from the ground, nosed down to follow the slope. Fifty feet from the stables on the southern edge he zoomed and turned. His ship disappeared from sight northward less than four hundred feet from the ground.

Duke cocked a speculative eye at the dark clouds less than a hundred feet above him. There was a twenty-mile wind on his tail, and being close to the ground the sensation of speed was tremendous.

Louisville, sprawling largely on both sides of the big bend in the Ohio, was partly in his path. He cut over the southern corner of the city, grinning down at the open-mouthed people who clogged the streets. He was flying so low—of necessity—that his Liberty was probably making an ungodly noise from the standpoint of the people below.

Louisville was left behind in five minutes, and he began to hit rough country. Ten miles northward he could catch occasional glimpses of the Ohio. It would be wiser and safer to follow the Ohio, but it would lose time.

A few drops of rain spattered on the wind-shield, but only for a moment. The clouds seemed to be forcing him downward, however. He was flying now with his head over the side of the cockpit for better visibility. He passed a hill, the crest of which seemed only a few feet beneath him.

"This is getting to be close," reflected Hemingwood without emotion.

He considered turning northward toward the Ohio, but decided against it. He could not get to Dayton before 12:30 as it was, and by the time he procured the necessary supplies and got home it would be late enough without losing any more time. There was a dance that night at the Officers' Club.

Suddenly the mist ahead darkened. He pulled back on the stick sharply—it was the side of a hill. Up and up went the ship barely scraping the tops of the great trees that clothed the slope. The speedmeter needle wabbled downward to seventy, then sixty-five miles an hour, and the big ship hung quivering in the air.

Hemingwood cursed calmly, and nosed over just the instant before the ship would have fallen off into a spin. He cleared the top of a tall row of trees, and set himself for a crash. Then—

"—— if that wasn't the top!" he congratulated himself.

His ship was gradually picking up speed, flying level, and there seemed to be no further slope upward. The mist was thickening, however, or rather the clouds. He was only fifty feet from the tree-tops, and was as high as the fog would allow him to go without getting out of sight of the ground.

A wide valley opened before him. Just as he saw it the ship hurtled into a huge black cloud that held rain, for in a second struts, wings and motor were covered with moisture. His goggles fogged, and he wiped them hastily as he nosed over. The roar of the engine strengthened and the wires began singing a higher-pitched tune.

"—— lucky that valley was there," he opined to himself as he came in sight of earth again.

The floor of the cut between the hills was a couple of hundred feet below, he estimated. He took time for a look backward. Woodruff's face was drawn and set, and his knuckles showed white as he gripped the cowling with both hands. Hemingwood grinned below his wet mustache. The photographic man did not return it.

There were a few clearings—small and rough—on the bottom below them. An occasional plowed spot appeared on the slopes on either side. The valley lay exactly on their course, as the compass proved. The motor fired like clockwork. Every instrument read correctly, and with a carefree heart Hemingwood glanced down at a few motionless people in front of a small cabin. As he was watching them a spurt of fire from the rifle in the hands of one of the men sent the pilot into the heartiest laugh he had had for many a day.

"Moonshiners, by ——!" he shouted aloud, although he might as well have whispered it. He could not hear his own words above the noise of the motor.

"These mountaineers sure love the government—not!" he reflected.

He leaned forward and stroked the motor cowling.

"Nice little motor, nice little motor," he said, his face a wide grin.

He leaned his head out the side of the cockpit to take a look ahead. It was lucky he did. At a speed that was sickening the De Haviland was rushing toward a hill, which closed the end of the valley tight as a drum. To make matters worse, the slopes on either side were converging. Even as he thought, the wooded walls drew so close together that an ordinary banking turn was impossible.

There was but one thing to do. He jerked back the stick and put on full rudder. Up went the D. H., and then over, nearly on its back. For a moment it hovered there, and then shot downward, the nose curving slowly upward. His right wing was almost scraping the trees on that side, and the floor of the valley rose to meet the uncontrollable downward rush.

With the stick clamped back as far as it would go Hemingwood waited impassively. Either the ship would come out of the dive in time, or it wouldn't. It finally did. Ten feet above the treetops it was straightened out, and sped like a bullet back over the trail it had come.

"I must tell Thomason about this," soliloquized the calm Hemingwood as he approached the spot where the mountaineers were still standing.

Thomason, a balloonist, had actually been shot down somewhere in the mountains not so far from this very place, and had barely got out alive.

There were two shots at him as he flashed by, and he waved a derisive arm at them.

He was entering the thick mist now, for there was but one recourse left. That was to get altitude enough in the fog to clear the mountains that hemmed the valley in on all sides, and make for the river. It was a desperate situation, and the nerve-strain on any pilot but the Duke would have been a breaking one. He was as cool as a May morning.

In a moment he was out of sight of the ground. He watched his speedmeter like a hawk. That was the only way to estimate whether he was close to a stall, or else diving. It crawled from 85 miles an hour to a hundred, and he pulled up sharply. At intervals he strained his eyes ahead, striving to pierce the smoky, opaque screen that made him as blind as a bat.

Eight hundred feet—he must be high enough to clear any mountains. The world about him was one of mist—not a strip of ground or a glimpse of the sky could he get. At a hundred miles an hour, after leveling out as closely as he could estimate, the big ship roared through the fog.

His eyes glued to the speedmeter, every faculty intent on keeping the ship on an even keel, he banked slightly until his compass read due north. He knew the Ohio was within a few miles of him, but how was he to know when he reached it? He could not see the ground, and the hills extended close to the banks of the river.

He flew for six minutes, and then decided to risk coming closer to the ground. He nosed down, and in a shallow dive felt his way toward the ground at ninety miles an hour. At five hundred feet a vaguely dark strip below him, seen too dimly to pick up details, showed him that he was not over the river.

He came down a little farther, and saw the ground fall away in a steep slope. At the foot of the slope a fairly large plowed field was discernible, and then a streak of silver came in sight. With an exultant roar the De Haviland dropped toward the river.

He turned to follow the river, less than a hundred feet high. If the motor should cut out it would mean landing in the water, but Hemingwood felt blissfully safe. He could see for a considerable distance ahead now. He dropped down until he was less than ten feet from the surface of the water, and shot past Aurora, Indiana, at a hundred and twenty miles an hour. He zoomed by a vessel, the decks of which were black with waving, wondering men who watched him flash by.

A thin filter of sunlight struck the surface of the river as the Big Miami River, which he would follow into Dayton, came in sight five miles ahead. George heaved a sigh of relief. There were bridges over the Big Miami at Hamilton and Middletown, and ten feet off the water would not be possible flying altitude. He lifted his ship in a steep climb, and succeeded in getting seven hundred feet before the river grew vague in its outlines below him.

The flat Ohio country was very comforting after the miles of flying over mountains and water. The fog was breaking slowly, and finally he came in sight of Dayton, with McCook Field showing flat and green in the corner of the city.

He looked back at Woodruff. The noncom's face looked as if its owner had been dragged through a knot-hole. It was strained and white, and every muscle was tensed.

"A couple of the boys bumped off in the Transcontinental by running into mountains in a storm," reflected Hemingwood as he dived for Wilbur Wright Field, where an aerial supply depot was located, seven miles east of town. "And I guess Woodruff thought considerable about 'em the last two hours. Man, doesn't he look sick!"

Hemingwood was chuckling as his ship scudded across the field.

AT THREE o'clock that afternoon they left the Big Miami behind and once again cut across the mountains of Kentucky, flying a bee-line for Camp Henry. Out on the wings, tied to the strut fittings, were four pint bottles of sulfuric acid, packed in sawdust. The ship was two thousand feet high, just below the clouds, which were thick enough to keep the earth below in deep shadow. The motor was running well, although it vibrated a little too much. The rugged, forest-covered hills and valleys below offered no opportunity for a forced landing, but Hemingwood nevertheless did not detour.

Ten minutes later he wished heartily that he had been less venturesome. The motor began to spit and miss. A quick glance at his gauges showed that all of them were reading correctly. He tried desperately to jazz the motor into life again by quick work with the throttle, but it was useless. Four or five cylinders were working, and the ship glided rapidly toward the wild country below. Fifteen miles northward the Ohio was visible—much too far to reach.

Hemingwood jockeyed the ship until the speedmeter was registering only seventy miles an hour, and then studied the earth calmly. There was only one cleared spot—a small plowed field on the side of a hill. A wreath of smoke from the cabin on its rim was the only sign of civilization anywhere within gliding distance. From the air it looked as though the slope fell off sharply from the lower edge of the field, into what was apparently a deep cut between two hills.

"I can hit that field, and run into the trees at the end of it, head-on," he reflected without emotion. "That ought to keep either of us from getting any sulfuric acid, but we'd sure better be ready to haul out of the wreck before she gets afire."

He cut the throttle and switches, and yelled to Woodruff to be ready to get out quickly. The sergeant's face was ashen. He nodded weakly, his pale eyes blazing in the terror-stricken face.

The pilot pushed up his goggles and cut the switches, circling slowly. Suddenly he craned his neck out the side, as they dropped to within a thousand feet of the ground. That slope from the lower edge of the field was steep and long, and the field itself lay on an extreme up-grade.

If he could get his wheels on the ground right at the lower edge of the field, it might be possible that the grade and the soft land would hold the ship back enough to prevent the crackup. If he should undershoot a trifle, the ship would go head-on into the mountainside.

"In which case, I wonder who'll take our bodies home?" he wondered as he sideslipped down.

He was directly over the crest of the hill opposite his field. He slipped down until only fifty feet were between the ship and the trees on top of the hill. Then he leveled out, and started his glide down the mountainside. The field was directly opposite. He clicked on the switches. The lazily turning propeller cranked the motor automatically, and the four cylinders caught.

He was about a hundred feet higher than the field on the opposite hillside, and the chasm was perhaps five hundred feet wide, at that point. With the throttle turned wide open the missing, sputtering motor helped make the glide shallow. Hemingwood's goggles were over his eyes again now, and every faculty was intent on his effort to make the field.

The ship floated across the valley with nerve-shaking slowness. He held it on the verge of a spin all the time, for apparently he had come too far down the side of the hill, and had not conserved altitude enough.

He was barely twenty-five feet above the level of the field's lower edge, and still two hundred feet from it, his ship wabbling dangerously. The drop into the valley from the edge of the cultivated ground was almost perpendicular. He took the only possible chance there was left for him.

He nosed down somewhat, and the speedmeter quickly jumped to ninety miles an hour. Fifty feet from the cliff he was level, but ten feet below his field and headed straight for the blank wall of earth. He zoomed. For a second the ship responded, but hung sickeningly before it quite cleared the treetops which fringed the level of the field. The trees themselves grew on the steep hill-side, but their tops were above the level of the field.

In that instant George Arlington Hemingwood found time for a lightning-like farewell to earth. Then the ship dropped. The forward mush was just enough to drag the tailskid through the treetops, and the ship flopped into the soft, steeply inclined field. It did not roll fifty feet, although the furrows were very shallow. Then the fuselage started to twist as the relieved pilot cut his throttle, and the slope caused the ship's weight to fall on the tailskid.

Hemingwood caught it in time, before something broke. With full gun it was just possible to taxi the ship up the hill. The field was almost a hundred and fifty yards long, he estimated as they crawled toward the woods and the cabin.

For the first time he noticed that a man and a woman stood in front of the shack.

In the man's hand was a gun.

"Doesn't look so good," was the pilot's estimate as he taxied slowly toward the upper end of the field.

Affecting not to notice the two mountaineers, he taxied to within a few feet of the woods, and left his throttle wide open, for the four cylinders were all needed to keep the ship from rolling backward.

"We'll have to get something to put under the wheels before we cut the motor," he shouted to Woodruff.

Woodruff nodded weakly. For a moment he was literally incapable of climbing out. Then a slow, unpleasant smile appeared on his thin lips. He was safe—and Captain Kennard would be several notches lower in the estimate of Camp Henry on the morrow, for there was no chance of getting out of this place, even with a good motor. He had not seen the shot at them that morning, nor did he take the gun which was in the hands of the near-by Kentuckian very seriously.

The Duke remained at the throttle while Woodruff slowly climbed out to secure something with which to brace the wheels. The two mountaineers came toward the ship, the rifle ready in the man's hand. Woodruff was carrying two sizable rocks toward the ship when Hemingwood saw him drop them and throw up his hands. The noise of the motor prevented his hearing any words, but the attitude of the man—who seemed very young, he noticed—left no doubt of his intentions.

Hemingwood climbed out, leaving the throttle wide open so that the sputtering motor would hold the ship. He walked toward the little group carelessly.

"Stop where ye air!" snapped the young Kentuckian, and the rifle swung menacingly.

"I've stopped already," rejoined Hemingwood, suiting the action to the word.

"Whut air ye doin' here?"

"Wondering how we're going to get out, brother," was the airy reply. "Say, we're neither one of us armed; let us put our hands down, will you?"

"Search 'em, Liz," commanded the young fellow, whose thin, tanned faced was hard.

He was dressed in a colorless shirt and overalls, a tattered felt hat on his head.

The girl advanced fearlessly, the man coming part way with her. His gray eyes shifted constantly from Woodruff to the short Hemingwood. The girl could not be over eighteen, Duke estimated, and was most remarkably good-looking.

Her brown hair was long and disorderly, and beneath the shapeless, washed-out calico dress, bare brown legs and feet testified that shoes and stockings were probably rare articles of apparel for her. She searched the airmen with quick thoroughness, her big brown eyes estimating and appraising them keenly as she thrust lean brown hands into their pockets.

"Hits all right, Mark," she said finally, stepping back toward her brother.

Her eyes wandered fascinatedly toward the big ship.

"Ye kin take down yer hands, then," stated the young fellow. "But I'm watchin' ye. Ye're army men, hain't ye?"

"Right—Air Service," rejoined the Duke. "Can I smoke a cigaret?"

The man nodded, watching suspiciously as Hemingwood produced a package of smokes and a box of matches. He offered his captor one, which was refused.

"What air ye doin' around hyar?"

"Our motor went bad and we had to come down to fix it," explained Hemingwood. "We didn't want to come down, you can bet on that."

"Mebbe ye did and mebbe ye didn't," was the suspicious reply. "We don't like gover'mint men around hyar."

"So I surmise," retorted Hemingwood, drawing peacefully on his cigaret.

"Well, what are you going to do with us?"

"We'll let Uncle Lafe fix that. He'll be home afore sundown. Liz, git some rope and tie 'em up."

"Just a minute," protested Hemingwood, glancing quickly at the motionless Woodruff. "Won't you let us turn the ship around and block the wheels so we can turn off that motor?"

The Kentuckian hesitated. The Duke noticed that whereas the girl seemed unable to take her eyes off the ship, the man almost ignored it as if it were a familiar sight to him.

"You see the ground is so steep that the ship will roll either backward or forward unless the wheels are braced. Just let us fix it up, and then tie us and be —— to you."

"Go ahead," consented their captor at length. "But hit'll go hard with ye if ye try t' git away."

Hemingwood was thinking swiftly as he signaled Woodruff to come and help him with the ship. There was a bare possibility that they could get away—there was only one man with a gun against them. It seemed useless to figure on the ship, but he had no mind to be a captive in the mountains any longer than he could help. He knew the railroad was only a few miles away, running along the banks of the river.

Together he and Woodruff lifted the tail of the ship, careful not to lift it so high that the whirling propeller would hit the ground.

"We may have a chance to get away from here, Sergeant," said the pilot rapidly. "Get into action the minute you see me start."

The sergeant did not reply.

They braced the wheels of the ship, which was now pointed down the hill, and then Hemingwood cut throttle and spark. The silence seemed intense as their ears were relieved of the constant noise of the motor.

"By George, Woodruff, look what was the matter!"

George pointed disgustedly to the right distributer head, which had worked loose from its clamp.

"Probably a lot of water had worked in to them both, too," added Woodruff, who did not mind showing his knowledge now that there was no chance to make Goddard Field by nightfall—or any other time in the near future.

"Short circuit," agreed Hemingwood. "Fix it up, will you, while we have a chance?"

A desperate expedient was forming in his mind—if the motor could be fixed. He perfected it as he stood beside the cowling while Woodruff worked. The watchful mountaineer held his gun ready for immediate action. He was standing, with the girl, about ten feet away from the ship. She was drinking in, what to her, was evidently a marvelous sight, for the big De Haviland looked positively huge—much bigger than the tiny cabin near by.

Hemingwood surveyed her with equal interest—in fact both of the Kentuckians were interesting. Straight as young pines—tanned, clear-eyed, breathing of the out-of-doors—and with an undercurrent of purposeful determination that was unescapable.

Hemingwood noticed that what looked like the fading signs of welts were discernible on the girl's legs—it looked as if they might have been striped with red bands not so long before.

Suddenly he decided to make his play. Woodruff was standing on a nose-drift wire, the other foot on the motor-cowling, and could jump down to his assistance quickly. Unwittingly his captor helped his plan.

"Thet's a De Haviland, haint it?" he remarked unexpectedly.

"Why, yes. How did you know?" replied the surprized flier.

"I wuz drafted down to Camp Henry in the war and there wuz some airyplanes thar," said the Kentuckian.

"Oh, I see. I thought you didn't seem greatly interested in a ship," said Hemingwood, walking carelessly forward.

He appeared to trip on a clod of earth, and fell prone on the ground. As he sat up, the muzzle of the rifle was perhaps three feet away from him.

He grinned cheerfully at the Kentuckian, and started to brush himself off.

"Did you ever get a ride?" he inquired.

The ex-soldier relaxed a trifle from the quick tenseness resulting from the unexpected fall of the pilot.

"No, and I haint hankerin' fer any," he said.

Hemingwood's arms were flailing away at his dust-covered shirt and breeches, in gradually increasing arcs.

"Well, if we get out of here and you're ever down——"

One of those arms shot forward like a flash of light, and knocked the gun muzzle aside. The Duke grasped his captor's legs with the other hand, and the mountaineer fell on top of him.

"All right Woodruff," he yelled at the top of his lungs, and then saved his breath.

The gun had fallen from the other man's hand; and in a struggling heap that raised clouds of choking dust the two struggled. Hemingwood fought like a wildcat for a few seconds, wondering why the sergeant did not come to his assistance. Suddenly a kicking, clawing burden was added to the heap. For a moment the choking, blinded, panting flier was relieved, and then his hand caught hold of long, silky hair.

It was the girl, and she was of no mean assistance to her brother. In a few seconds Hemingwood was flat on his back. The girl, her wild beauty intensified by her flashing eyes, was perched on his recumbent form, and two arms that seemed to have the strength of a man's held him down while Mark secured the gun. Woodruff had not moved.

For an instant Hemingwood's face grew bleak and hard, as with tightened lips he glanced at the sergeant.

"You ——, yellow coward!" he said slowly, and then his eyes met the girl's.

"I hope I didn't mess you up any, sister," he grinned, his brown eyes alight with admiration.

"Git up, Liz," commanded the man.

She clambered off, and Hemingwood arose to a sitting position.

"I'll bet the young lady here that I can lick you and that spineless, chicken-livered nincompoop up there," he said cheerfully.

The young mountaineer's set face relaxed a trifle.

"I guess mebbe ye could," he admitted. "Liz, go up to the house and git that rope."

Woodruff, licking his dry lips, climbed down from the motor. He had wiped off the distributors and fixed the one which had fallen partially off. He did not dare look at Hemingwood.

The girl was off toward the cabin, her lithe young body covering the ground swiftly in long, graceful strides. Her hair whipped behind her in a stream of glinting beauty.

"Listen here, Mark—I heard the girl call you that—if you'll dispense with tying us up I'll give you my word of honor that there'll be no more funny business. That hookworm there couldn't bother a lamb, and I won't try to."

Mark shook his head, his eyes cold.

"Oh come on, be a sport," urged Hemingwood, still sitting on the ground. "I told you we came down here by accident, and—near killed ourselves doing it, too. I don't care whether you make moonshine enough to fill the river there—my business is flying, not spotting stills."

Again the Kentuckian shook his head.

"See those things tied to the struts? That's sulfuric acid that we were bringing from Dayton. We needed it badly to take some pictures down at Camp Henry tomorrow. I guess they'll have to do without 'em now. I was hoping to either get the ship out of here some way or else hit the pike for the railroad and carry it in that way.

"Why man alive, I'd give a lot for a drink of moonshine right now. Anyway, I'm not asking you to let us go, even although I can't see why on earth you should hold us. All I'm asking is not to make me lay around tied until this uncle of yours get here."

Hemingwood was smiling, his eyes meeting his captor's gaze steadily. The Kentuckian appeared to be considering the matter as the girl came out of the cabin with some clothes-line in her hands. Woodruff was silent, his eyes on the ground and his thin, melancholy face expressionless.

Hemingwood, encouraged by the mountaineer's silence, tried a new tack.

"If you were in the army you know that the army has nothing to do with revenue officers—that our business is totally different. And you likewise know that an officer doesn't give his word of honor lightly. What say?"

"Word of honor?" inquired Mark unexpectedly, his keen eyes resting unwaveringly on Hemingwood's face.

"Word of honor," returned the flier. "That is, until your uncle comes."

"Don't worry—ye kain't git away from him," was the reply. "Liz we hain't goin' t' tie 'em. They swore not to git away till Uncle Lafe gits hyar."

The girl threw down the rope and dropped to the ground, her eyes seeking the ship again.

"That's the stuff," said the Duke heartily. "Woodruff, if you try anything—which you haven't got the guts to do, of course—but if you should go crazy and try something, I'll help the folks here to get you. *Sabe?*"

Woodruff nodded. He was well enough satisfied. He thought with a pleasant sense of work well done that those important pictures would not be obtained on the morrow—and that a valuable ship was down where it would take a lot of work to get it back to the field again. He eased his lank form to the ground, tipped his hat over his eyes, appeared to go to sleep.

"Don't think I'm going to try to persuade you to let me go, Mark, but may I ask just why you insist on holding us?"

"You're gover'mint!" said the girl unexpectedly.

"And that means our names are mud, eh?"

Mark's face lightened a trifle at the phrase which he remembered from his brief army career.

"Strangers—gover'mint strangers—mean trouble around hyar," he stated.

"You think we were flying around to spot stills, eh?"

Mark considered the matter, his lean, clean-cut face serious.

"I hain't certain you wasn't," he said finally. "What I think hain't nothin' to do with hit, though. Uncle Lafe'd skin us alive if I let ye go. Uncle Lafe's bad."

"He is, is he? What do you figure he'll do with us?"

"He'll kill ye," said the girl calmly, her eyes shifting quickly from Hemingwood's back to the ship.

"Mebbe not," interposed Mark. "But ye'll hev t' tell him a lot afore he'll decide not to. He's sure pizen to revenooers."

"Is this young lady your sister?" inquired Hemingwood, who showed no effects of the girl's somewhat startling announcement.

"Yes—we live with Uncle Lafe," returned Mark.

"Always have?"

Mark shook his head.

"Pappy died when I wuz in th' army. We hain't no other place."

"From what you say, Uncle Lafe must be rather—er——"

"He's a terror," vouchsafed the girl without emotion.

The flier's eyes strayed to the dimly discernible red streaks on her legs. Mark's gaze followed his, and the young fellow's face grew bitter. He answered Hemingwood's unasked question.

"He giv' Liz an awful hidin', day before yeste'day," he said.

Hemingwood whistled wonderingly.

"Why don't you leave him and go away somewhere?" he inquired.

"Can't leave Liz—we hain't no other place," he said.

Hemingwood gradually changed the subject. As the sun sank farther westward he drew out the Kentuckian on his army life. There was a faint wistfulness apparent in the mountaineer's eyes and voice as he gradually told more and more about those eventful months at Camp Henry.

"Did you ever think you might like to go back in the army?" inquired Hemingwood, on whom the young fellow's attitude had not been lost.

"Kain't leave Liz," repeated Mark. "Uncle Lafe'd hev killed her, purty near, only last week if it hadn't of been fer me."

"He wuz drunk," explained Liz, leaning back restfully on her elbows, and wriggling her bare toes in the coarse earth.

"Listen!" said Hemingwood eagerly. "You can't fool me. You'd like to get away from here. Bring your sister down to Camp Henry, enlist, and I'll give you my word you'll both be taken care of. You——"

"Don't start actin' up!" warned the mountaineer, his face all suspicious watchfulness.

"I'm not—don't worry. But let me tell you—" and Hemingwood went on eagerly in his effort to take advantage of what he believed to be the buried desire of the Kentuckian to get out into the world again.

George Arlington Hemingwood could talk, when he had to, and he brought all his persuasive powers to bear. He glimpsed beneath the bald statements of the two waifs, the sordidness and fear of their existence with the old reprobate who was their uncle, and he dwelt on the extra pay Mack would draw in the Air Service, the opportunities which he, Hemingwood, would see that the girl had to go to school, if she wanted to, or to work in Louisville.

It was no easy job, for all the inbred loyalty of the mountaineer to his clan was against him.

"I've got plenty of money, and I'll see that you have all you need to get down there," Hemingwood said when it seemed as though his glowing words had made an impression on Mark.

He was not talking entirely selfishly, either—the Duke did not know what fear really meant. Those welts on the girl's body had brought home to him the conditions under which she was living, and it was really as much for her sake as his own that he endeavored to persuade Mark to see things his way.

“Think of your sister, man. I think there may be a chance that I can get this ship out of here. If I can't we'll get out of here on foot—together. If she'd rather, your sister can live on the post with you, someway or other. We can fix it. Why should you knuckle down to your uncle and let him whip you and make you work like a dog for food and clothes?”

The young fellow's eyes stole toward his sister. She had said nothing, but her heavily lashed eyes were glowing softly at the prospect the flier held out. Hemingwood was certain that he was on the right track, if he could overcome the mountaineer's fierce, unthinking loyalty to tradition.

“What do you say?” asked Hemingwood eagerly, his eyes on the girl.

“I'd like t' git away from Uncle Lafe, but——”

“And you're going to get away!” said Hemingwood exultantly.

“Come on, Mark. I'll give you money right now—you and the girl start out for the nearest town where you can get the train, and Woodruff and I'll see if we can get out of here by ship. If we can't, we'll follow you. Leave me your gun so we can 'tend to Uncle Lafe if he gets here before we leave—meanwhile you and your sister will be out of the way.

“You've been waiting for a chance to get away, and now you've got it. And I'm giving you my word again that you're going to have a friend in me, and that you need have no fear that anything will go wrong after we get down there. If you're the kind of a man I think you are it will be no time at all before you're a sergeant, on flying status if you want to be, and in that case you'll be making plenty of money to live comfortably. You owe it to yourself, old man, and to your sister even more.”

“I'd like t' do hit, Mark,” announced the girl.

The inner struggle that was going on in Mark's heart was plainly discernible in his set face. Hemingwood and the girl waited silently. Whether by accident or not her fingers strayed over the faint, discolored streaks that banded her legs.

Still Mark did not say anything. The sun was about to disappear below the crest of the hillside across the small valley, and there was no sound to break the Summer quiet except the faint hum of busy insects. The tall trees rimming the clearing were motionless—not a breath of air stirred their tops.

“Does your uncle beat you often?” asked Hemingwood of the girl.

“Sometimes he hides me when I kain't git out o' the way—mostly when he's drunk,” she replied softly. “Look hyar.”

She raised the faded calico skirt to her knees. A livid scar that seemed to the flier to be weeks old stood out against the brown flesh.

“Thet wuz a piece of wire,” she said calmly.

Even Woodruff, who had been lying apparently asleep, pursed his lips as he saw that scar. The Duke sprang to his feet, his brown eyes and lean face expressing determination in every look and line.

“Mark, you're coming to Camp Henry!”

“I guess you're right,” said the Kentuckian slowly.

“Fine! Woodruff'll tell you how to help him start the motor—I don't know yet whether I'll make a try at getting out of here or not. We've got to——”

“STAND whar ye air!”

The girl gasped, and Mark's face grew bleak as all four of them turned to confront the tall, lanky old man who held a gun on them from fifty feet away. Only Woodruff smiled with relief. That crazy Hemingwood might have tried to get out of the field.

With long, somewhat unsteady strides the bearded old man came toward them. His nose was high and aquiline, his beard iron gray. At first glance he was impressive, and then one noticed the small, bloodshot eyes and the utterly hard, cruel mouth. His beard was stained with tobacco, and from beneath the dilapidated hat stringy, unkempt locks escaped in repulsive disorder.

Hemingwood stood motionless; brother and sister arose to their feet. The girl held her skirt, as though unconsciously, in one hand. That livid welt around her knee could be plainly seen.

For a moment the old man surveyed them with cruel satisfaction. His bloodshot eyes rested on the gun which was on the ground, a few feet from Mark. They remained only briefly on the ship, and then shifted to meet Hemingwood's gaze. There was a baleful glare in them that boded ill for the airman.

"Gover'mint, eh?" he sneered. "I've seed these hyar airyplanes around, and been hankerin' to ketch one of 'em."

"We had to land. It was an accident, sir. We were coming from Dayton to Louisville. Personally, I just want to get away from here——"

"Likely ye air anxious to git away now," retorted the old man with drunken satisfaction. "But ye kain't."

He seemed to be in a state of complete exultation—mentally licking his lips over the prospect before him. He shifted his eyes to his nephew.

"And whut hev you been up to? Why is thet gun lyin' over thar when ye ought t' hev these revenooers tied tighter'n a drum?"

Mark was silent. The utter fear expressed in both his own and his sister's faces was a revelation to Hemingwood. Even Woodruff, who had been smiling to himself at the turn events had taken, was sobered by the baleful determination apparent in the old man, whose menacing rifle was constantly ready for action.

"Answer me, ye skunk!" roared the mountaineer in sudden fury.

The girl quailed as though from a blow, but her brother gave no indication that he had heard.

For a moment it seemed that the old man was about to leap on his nephew, and then he thought better of it.

"I'll tend t' you and Liz later," he said significantly.

Hemingwood sickened with a physical nausea as the bloodshot eyes roved over the girl's rounded form. In a flash of comprehension he saw what he believed to be the horrible truth. What he had heard, from men who knew, about the terrible degradation that sometimes could be found back in the hills, came to him with the force of a blow. He believed that in Mark and his uncle he had before him living illustrations of all that was best, and all that was lowest, in the mountain people.

"Put down yer dress, ye ——!" roared Lafe in uncontrollable fury, and there followed a stream of filthy epithets hurled at the cowering girl.

Something snapped in Hemingwood's brain. He leaped forward, straight at the mountaineer and his gun. Like a flash the old man raised it to his shoulder. He did not see his nephew hurl himself forward. Mark had been standing to one side of his uncle, and an instant before the crack of the shot, which would have surely been the end of Hemingwood, the young Kentuckian's hand knocked the rifle downward and sideward.

There was a groan from Woodruff. Mark, with the gun which he had twisted from his uncle's hands, turned quickly. The non-com. had dropped to the ground the instant Hemingwood had launched himself at the mountaineer, and the wild shot had reached him as he lay prone to escape any chance of being hit. When Hemingwood reached his side he was dead—shot cleanly through the heart.

There was no time to think of him, for a moment. For just an instant the old man hesitated, and then with a bestial snarl leaped at his nephew, who was standing as though carved from stone, the gun in his hands. Hemingwood came to his assistance just in time. The old man had almost succeeded in wresting the rifle from the surprized Mark's grasp.

He fought with a crazed strength that gave the two other men plenty to handle for a moment, but finally, with the help of the girl, they had him tied securely with rope she had brought down to use on the airmen. The old man lay quietly; a terrible glare in his eyes.

"Woodruff is dead," Hemingwood announced quietly as he dusted himself off.

"If he hadn't been a coward he wouldn't be!" flashed the girl.

"I know that. Thank you, Mark, for keeping me alive."

"Whut air we goin' t' do now?" demanded the girl, her bosom rising and falling quickly.

"Give me just a minute and I'll tell you."

The flier's smoldering eyes rested on Woodruff's body for a moment, and then on the murderer. He walked slowly down the field, followed by the wondering looks of the others. Few men would have even considered for a moment what Hemingwood had in mind, but his customary careless fearlessness was now intensified by the overwhelming revulsion and hate that swept him as he thought of the man who had killed Woodruff. He thought of the old mountaineer, as something vicious and unclean—a human vulture.

He walked back up the field, after looking for a while down into the valley, coldly estimating his chances.

"Help me bind Woodruff and your uncle together, will you Mark?" he said quietly.

Something about him prevented either Mark or his sister from asking questions. Without a word they bound the dead man and his murderer together with the remains of the clothes-line.

"Now help me lift them into the back cockpit."

It was a severe task, but they finally accomplished it. The old man's eyes glared horribly with fear and hatred as Hemingwood adjusted Woodruff's helmet and goggles on the head of his murderer. The sergeant's head lolled back with the limpness of death. Hemingwood calmly lengthened the belt in the back seat, and snapped it around the tightly bound bodies. He folded the observer's stool in the cockpit, so that the old man was standing, the dead body bound to him tightly.

"Now what I'm going to do is this," the flier told Mark and his sister after he had finished his arrangements. "I believe I can get off here, if the motor is running. We'll soon find out about that. I'll give you plenty of money—you can come down to Camp Henry by train, and all I said goes. I'll turn over your uncle to the authorities down there, and you two can be witnesses along with me. All right?"

"I reckon hit is," nodded Mark comprehendingly.

"Now help me carry a couple of those small tree-trunks down to the edge of the field."

The two men had soon placed three of the trimmed trees which Hemingwood had noticed on the edge of the woods along the lower edge of the field, about ten feet from the end of the cleared land. The timbers were small—not more than five or six inches in diameter.

"Now we'll try the motor. If she doesn't hit on all twelve, I'll go with you and we'll take Uncle Lafe along."

Hemingwood crawled into the front cockpit, turned on the gas petcocks, pumped up the air, and set throttle and spark. Then he gave the motor some stiff shots with the primer.

"Grab hold of that propeller and swing it around a few times, will you?" he called to Mark, and the sturdy Kentuckian obeyed promptly.

"All right—now get away from it."

The pilot snapped on both switches, and climbed out. He glanced at the rocks under the wheels to make sure they were all right, and then gave his aid brief instructions about swinging a propeller. The old man in the rear cockpit did not open his lips, but in his small eyes was the fear of the unknown. The girl watched with lively, if uncomprehending, interest as Mark set himself, Hemingwood's hand gripping his wrist firmly.

With Hemingwood doing the counting, they swung at the count "three." The motor sputtered as the pilot jerked his helper out of the way, but did not catch. On the third try it did, however, and ran smoothly at idling.

Hemingwood took a chance on letting it run for a moment without his hand at the throttle.

"Here's sixty dollars—that will get you there all right. Come right up to Goddard Field and ask for me, and from that time on don't worry. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. And we're appreciatin' hit, Liz and me. Hit's——"

"Appreciate nothing. It's little enough return for what you did for me, and you're going to enjoy it, too. Why say, sister, when you get all dolled up down there half the men in camp——"

The girl's eyes dropped shyly at his laughing insinuation.

Hemingwood became serious again as he surveyed the darkening sky. It would be totally dark in ten minutes, and there was as desperate a trip ahead of him as he had ever had in his eventful flying career.

"Good-by for a few hours—I must be going."

Mark and his sister stood aside as Hemingwood carefully inspected the stones which were acting as wheel-blocks. He climbed into the ship without moving them. Dusk was creeping over the quiet, deserted valley as he inched the throttle farther and farther open. Twelve hundred revolutions was as high as he dared run it on the warm-up, for fear of jumping the blocks. To his great satisfaction the motor ran perfectly on both switches. The trouble had evidently been the loosened distributor head, plus the effect of water getting in touch with the segments which carried current to the sparkplugs.

The Duke adjusted his helmet and goggles and looked around at his ghoulish burden. A last look at the intruments showed nothing amiss.

Bit by bit he shoved throttle and spark ahead, until at sixteen hundred revolutions the great ship strained against the rocks beneath the wheels. Out on the struts the sulfuric acid containers vibrated with the strain, but the safety-wire which held them was strong.

Suddenly the pilot jerked back on the stick. The ship leaped the blocks, and thus a few feet ordinarily used to get up speed were gained. Nosed down until the propeller was almost scraping the ground it roared down the hillside, the exhaust shooting long streaks of flame in the thickening darkness.

The soft ground held it back, and only sixty miles an hour showed on the speedmeter as the wheels hit the low barricade of tree-trunks at the lower edge of the field. The ship bounced in the air, escaping the protruding tops of the trees, and then Hemingwood shoved the stick forward all the way. The great ship dove for the bottom of the valley.

Hemingwood, his head outside the cockpit, knew that all depended on perhaps two feet. Would the ship, almost stalled in the bounce, pick up flying speed in that straight dive downward, before it crashed on the floor of the valley? For seconds that seemed like years the De Haviland dropped into the shadowy void.

Slowly he eased back on the stick, and then he knew he had won his gamble. A few feet above the earth the ship came level, the motor running with even rhythm on the continuance of which meant safety. Before he reached the end of the valley he was a thousand feet high, and had turned back to the river.

Stars were blinking in a clear sky and lights winked out from isolated houses as he followed the wide band of silver below him, southward toward Camp Henry. Motor failure would be fatal, even now, for the earth was in shadow so complete that accurate landing would be impossible, and there was no chance to pick a field. The motor, however, drummed along evenly, and no music on earth could have been so sweet to the pilot's ears.

Louisville was aglow with light as he passed over it, the long exhaust flame giving the impression that the ship was afire to any one unfamiliar with flying. Hemingwood grinned as he imagined the consternation in that great city below as the flaming, roaring machine sped along high in the night sky.

Ten minutes more brought the lights of Camp Henry in sight, and Hemingwood circled for ten minutes until the men at Goddard Field had a chance to prepare for his landing. Soon the field was a dark square rimmed by a frame of fire. They had filled holes in the ground with gasoline and set it afire.

For the third time that day Hemingwood became a man whose every energy of mind and body was concentrated on his work. Bit by bit he came down, his unwinking eyes watching the speedmeter and the field alternately. Occasionally he jazzed the throttle, and huge spurts of flame shot from the exhaust pipes.

A quarter-mile back over Camp Henry he was three hundred feet high. The motor came full on until he had almost reached the field. Then he cut it, and floated downward, every faculty intent on missing those trees and stables on the edge of the field. They stood out in dark relief against the flaming gasoline.

He leveled out too high—he could not judge the smudge of ground accurately. For a sickening moment he was afraid, as he dropped, that all his work had been for nought and that in a moment sulfuric acid would be spraying a cracked-up ship. With stick back he dropped that eight feet and kept the ship level. It bounced twice, and then the grade of the hill stopped his roll.

Half of Camp Henry seemed packed on the line as he taxied up with as strange a burden as a ship ever carried.

AT ONE o'clock that night the fliers staggered home from the dance.

Hemingwood's cargo had created a distinct sensation in camp, and a hastily gathered board of medical officers had conducted an inquest. Another board would sit on the case on the morrow, when Mark and his sister arrived. The civil authorities in Louisville had been notified, and the morrow bid fair to be very busy for the

Duke. Uncle Lafe was awaiting the arrival of the Louisville police in the Camp Henry guardhouse.

The general had asked the Duke smilingly, as to whether he had had a good trip. The slightly intoxicated George Hemingwood had replied:

"Any time we get there and back it's a good trip, general," and then took himself off abruptly to dance with a comely young woman who, in comparison with the wiry flier seemed built on the architectural lines of the Statue of Liberty.

"No use telling these high-rankers all the details," he confided to Captain Kennard as they undressed.

"We'll tell him tomorrow, and get some credit for the Air Service," returned the C. O. "He'll be pretty anxious to know all the lurid details."

"I wish you'd reward me by letting me sleep later in the morning—verbal credit buys no shoes, and likewise actions speak louder than words."

He buttoned his pajamas, sighing resignedly.

"It's no use wishing," he said as he came toward the captain, walking with exaggerated care to keep from reeling. White lightning, which had flowed somewhat freely at the dance, has a kick in every drop.

"Here's your alarm clock, cap'n," he yawned, presenting a slipper. "You might throw a boot if you didn't have it."

A moment later he was asleep. Tomorrow was another day.

WITCHCRAFT

by Hugh Pendexter

ONE of the most popular outdoor sports in Europe in the old times was witchcraft. It was brought across the Atlantic and had its vogue in New England. It was ever a popular pastime in darkest Africa. So it is not surprizing that the belief should have been firmly rooted in the new world many generations before the white men came.

The American Indians were firm believers in witches and they were one with the old world, and the transplanted new, in their mode of procedure. To bewitch a person white and red man sought possession of something he had worn, or a lock of his hair, etc. Another Indian method was to make an image of the victim and thrust sharp instruments through it. In this fashion a wizard boasted he could kill by absent treatment.

Alexander Henry, the trader, tells how the Chippewa outlined a figure in sand and then maltreated it. This was as efficacious as to use an effigy. Witchcraft was a dangerous vocation, and the aborigines were quick to resent and punish it.

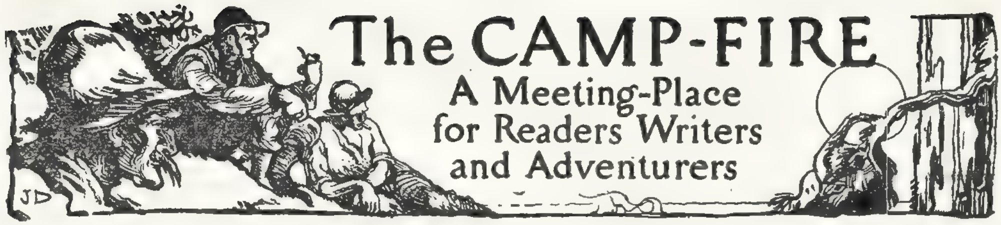
The most dreaded of all Cherokee witches was the Raven Mocker. The many killings among the Cherokee as a result of their belief in witches, resulted, in 1824, in a law making it murder for the slaying of an alleged witch, and providing a whipping for any one charging another with being a witch. Among the Wyandots witchcraft was punishable by death, either by stabbing, tomahawking, or burning. A grand council of the tribe investigated all such charges. If convicted the defendant could appeal to the fire test, which consisted of running from east to west, and from north to south, through a circular fire. If he emerged from the ordeal uninjured he was innocent.

If a person among the Wyandots grew deaf, or blind, or had earaches and headaches, his affliction, should he have been suspected of sorcery in the past, would be *prima facie* evidence that he was a witch, and that his evil inclinations had turned and were tormenting him. He was punished.

The Iroquois myths are filled with stories of witches. A man on the Buffalo reservation saw a dog blowing fire from mouth and nostrils and shot it. He followed the bloody trail till two feet took the place of four. The dog was a woman witch. He followed it to the Tonawanda reservation and found the woman dying. A variant of the European were-wolf.

Mary Jamison was bewitched by Andrew John; but witch-doctors succeeded in outwitching the witch, and he died of consumption. Before she was relieved Mary saw a dog that her friends were unable to kill. She was attended by a cat no one else could see.

Another witch on the Tonawanda reservation could turn himself into a hog. Had he lived in these times he would have been a profiteer!



The CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

IT SEEMED to me that every time he dropped into the office, when his duties in the Air Service brought him near New York, Thomson Burtis mentioned casually that one or more of the originals of the characters in his stories had met with accident and "gone west." So I asked him to give all of us the list of those who had been killed since he began writing these stories for us:

Langley Field, Hampton, Virginia.

In complying with your request to let the Camp-Fire gang in on the real fate of the people back of my stories, I think it will be obvious that I can not give the real names of the characters. I have tried, in my gallery of Air Service portraits, to draw as truly as I could the real men—their foibles and weaknesses as well as their virtues—careless, reckless, more often than not of the type called "wild" by more dignified folks. And sometimes I have touched up or toned down the men I knew and liked, as the yarn required.

WHEN the stories were written, every man of them was alive. In the first yarn *Colonel Mills*, C. O. of Donovan Field, made his bow to *Adventure*. He was killed in an airplane wreck in the East, and the pilot of the plane was the original of *Jimmy Jennings*. They were caught in a storm.

Dumpy Scarth, lovable, brilliant, irrepressible, childlike in his satisfaction over his own striking ability as a flyer, was zooming a single-seated scout after dropping a bomb, and collided with another ship. Both men went west. He was a man that dared the gods to kill him every day he flew, and finally got his through an accident that is as rare as it is fatal, and at a time when he was not thinking of taking any chances. He was killed in Virginia.

TEX MACDOWELL still lounges his way through life unconcernedly, but the original of *Dave Ransom* dropped like a stone from three thousand feet. What went wrong with the ship we never knew. It happened down in Kentucky and I was assigned the melancholy duty of escorting his body back to New England.

Pete Miller, veteran of the border patrol, was killed in an automobile wreck down in Texas. *Sleepy Spears*, now married along with *Slim Evans*, is still around, but little *Al Johnson*, as brilliant an acrobatic pilot as ever flew a ship, hit a flag-pole some months ago and carried himself and his passenger into the phantom squadron. *Hub Chester*, reliable, quiet, with the reputation of getting where he was going without fail, cracked up in the Middle West and died from the effects.

Cutman, in "There and Back," was recently bumped off over in Germany. *Captain Kennard* is at a Northern field now, and *Colonel Feldmore* and *Captain Adams* have jobs connected with running the whole Air Service. *Major Stratton* is on foreign service. The border patrol has scattered—but it sure was an outfit.—BURTIS.

IF E. T. S. wants news of Major North he might address his brother, Captain L. H. North, in care of our magazine. Meanwhile he brings up an interesting subject that for some strange reason has never been much discussed at Camp-Fire—tracking. Personally, I'd like to hear a lot of talk about it and maybe some of you feel the same way.

E. T. S. starts the ball with a humorous yarn:

Cleveland, Ohio.

In "Camp-Fire" a few months ago there was an inquiry about Major North, who commanded the Pawnee Scouts during the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad I was a civil engineer in charge of a party from the time the rails reached Julesburg (1867) until the junction with the Central Pacific Railroad in 1869 and was well acquainted with Major North, meeting him frequently during the year of 1868, when the Sioux were constantly raiding our camps and attacking us in the field. There was a good account of him in one of the leading magazines some time between 1887 and 1891, but I could not identify it in any index accessible.

HARKING back to the old frontier and Indians suggests the idea that comments from old-timers on the vanishing art of tracking would be interesting to many of your readers, including the younger generation, who have never seen "Indian sign" or trailed big game. A few months in a hostile Indian country will develop a man's power of observation to a degree that would win the approval of Sherlock Holmes, yet a fairly good tracker will occasionally make deductions that are wide of the mark, as illustrated in the following old-time—

Camp-Fire Yarn

"Yes," said the old prospector, as he thoughtfully spat into the camp-fire, "as you say, the alkali desert country is —— on clothes and shoes. Old Man Winters up at Pahrump Ranch wunst got into a tight fix on that account. He'd been snookin' round all Summer till he wore out nigh everythin' he had. It was before the railroads was built and there wasn't no place handier than San Ber'dino to buy shoes at. He wanted to go into the Chaliston Mountains to hunt up some cattle and he traded a pair of moccasins off an Indian and started.

"THE first night out the moccasins had got wet, so he hung 'em up by the fire to dry. They was pretty high flavored and when they got warm a ciyote upon the range winded 'em and he come down and eat 'em both up and left old Winters plumb barefoot. He got home all right and reckoned he'd go to San Ber'dino for shoes, so he got out his mules and buckboard, but the blamed mules took skeered at somethin' and bolted 'fore he could get 'em hitched up. He couldn't foller 'em up barefoot in that cactus country, so he went skirmishin' round the barn for somethin' to put on and come across a pair of them canvas nose-bags with round bottoms of leather and put 'em on his feet and tied the neck ropes round his legs and took after the mules.

"BILL SLAVIN and Scotty Macpherson was a chloridin' at that time on a claim at the head of the valley. They was most out of grub and Bill was out with a shotgun after quail and he cut old Winters' trail and didn't know what to make of it, so he took to follerin' it and puzzlin' over it and getting more skeered every rod he went. At last he come to a borax flat where Winters had crossed to git round a p'int of rock and had sunk in pretty deep. The tracks was so all-fired big that Bill got rattled completely and run all the way back to camp where his pardner was.

" 'Fetch out the needle-gun, Scotty,' says he, 'and all the cartridges; there's a elephant down here on the flat!'

" 'Elephant your grandmother,' says Scotty; "there ain't no elephants in this country.'

" 'Yes, there is,' says Bill. 'I tracked him mor'n a mile and I'd taken a crack at him if I'd had anythin' bigger'n birdshot with me.'

" 'How many toes did he have?' says Scotty. 'It didn't have no toes,' says Bill; 'it's a young one. Come on down an' I'll show you.'

" 'So they took the needle-gun and started out, and when they come to the borax flat Scotty took skeered, too, and wouldn't go no farther, so they come over to Youndt's Ranch to get help.

"While they was tellin' 'bout the elephant, old man Winters come ridin' in with the mules that he'd ketched and he had the nosebags on, and they seen how it was.

"Everybody laughed at the boys and they got mad and had a fight and give up the claim and went away. It's up there now if you want to locate it."—E. T. S.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Rolf Bennett rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Pendennis, St. Ives, Cornwall, England.

It is with great pleasure that I conform to the time-honored custom of the Adventurers and stand up to introduce myself, albeit, I trust, with the modesty befitting a newcomer among those gathered round the Camp-Fire.

Because brevity commends itself to all; because, also, there may be others waiting their turn to stand up before you, I will tell you my story in as few words as shall suffice to give you a glimpse of what manner of man this newcomer is.

I WAS born in London and, like many another unwise urchin before and since, ran away to sea. I spent some years before the mast in all sorts of ships, but nothing unduly exciting happened except two fires at sea and one mutiny.

After several vain attempts to start in business in the West Indies and then in South America, I worked my passage home from Rosario to England in a tramp steamer. Without quite knowing how it came about, I drifted into journalism and, after working on country papers for a time, went to London. After some experience there as a "space merchant," I joined the staff of one of the big dailies and later became special correspondent. Thinking how nice it would be to sit at a desk and mutilate other fellows' stuff, I became sub-editor on a London evening paper. I held that job down for two years, by which time I was more sick of office work, blue-pencils and tickers than of anything I had ever experienced before.

IT DOESN'T pay to do the thing you don't like longer than you can help. It means you can't give your best. So I let some one else have that job and I took to writing fiction. I found it suited me, also that I was meeting with more success than I had dared to anticipate—till the war broke out. I enlisted in the Royal Artillery, got a commission eighteen months later, stopped a "Blighty" during the last German advance and spent the next nine months in hospital. Finally I was discharged from the army as medically unfit for further military service.

And now, amidst the rugged beauty of Cornwall, I am once more wielding the pen.—ROLF BENNETT.

IF ONLY there were space enough it would be good to have every one of us stand up and give an account of himself:

Detroit, Mich.

I have read *Adventure* since January, 1912, and have only missed a few issues while in France. I have not taken any part in the subjects that are discussed at "Camp-Fire," but I can assure you that this section is of great interest to me.

I am an Englishman. Have traveled in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany (this was before the War). Also I have seen some parts of Canada.

When I first landed in this country I had no intention of staying, but after traveling around some I decided to settle and become an American. That was ten years ago. But some of these days I hope to have the pleasure of seeing Japan, China and India.

The only adventure that I can lay claim to is: Black-jacked in London, 1908. Stabbed in the leg while in Antwerp, Belgium, 1910. Put two years in France with the First Canadian Machine Gun Batt. During that time I was wounded twice. —S. C. BATTEN.

SO MANY letters have come in in connection with Hugh Pendexter's stories of the early days of this country, often asking for the names of books giving information, that I asked him whether it would be too much trouble to give all of us a list of such books. As a good many of you have found, it's never too much trouble for Hugh Pendexter to be accommodating, so the list follows.

First, his letter that accompanied it. The books mentioned have either already been published, are now in our safe or in process of writing. The letter was not intended for Camp-Fire, but I know Mr. Pendexter will not mind its going on to you.

Norway, Maine.

Dear Hoffman:

I am enclosing a short list of books. I have a copy and can add to them. I had thought of dividing, roughly, the West into eras. Of course books cited here on the fur trade and the Santa Fé Trail will overlap into Injun dope, etc. All these books are easily accessible, with possible exceptions of Ross' and Leonard's narratives. College and public libraries will have most of them. Now I have lists of works on the Indian, Western development, etc., which will probably run over 3,000. I had thought to weed out the more accessible and trustworthy and begin back with first colonial days, when the Appalachians marked the beginning of the "West." Once they (the lists) are printed, you'll receive quite a few letters suggesting others.

IN writing my yarns I have been anxious to pick out a time which was a historical hinge on which our future development swung. "The Myth Killers" shows how France lost her chance to clinch her hold on the Mississippi Basin through the gullibility of the nation and its common belief in fairy-tales. Time 1720. Law's company, Bienville's effort to make France see the light, England's rôle as Myth Killer in building more prosaically, detailed glimpses of the seldom mentioned Natchez, also their neighbors, the Chickasaws and Choctaws. This yarn, together with "Red Belts," "The Floating Frontier," "The Torch Bearers" and "The Bush Fighters" furnish five very important historical hinges.

I have been doping out Lord Dunmore's War, 1774, as the background for another hinge, for, although very brief, it held the northwest Indians quiet for the first two years of the Revolution. Had they not been thoroughly whipped at Point Pleasant we would have emerged from the Revolution with the Alleghenies as our western bountion. Pontiac's War and Tecumseh's War were the last barriers to our expansion and paved the way for the beginning of that new era which began in 1807, *i. e.*, the public's recognition of steam in the development of travel, to be followed by the period of railroad building commencing in 1828. (If I were teaching history I'd teach *hinges*, so the scholar would have a comprehensive realization of how different periods were linked together and what causes constituted the links.) As strong conditional causes, prior to Pontiac's war, are the first three intercolonial wars — King William's, 1690, including Frontenac's campaign *vs.* the Iroquois, causing them to cease negotiations with western tribes and sue for peace, *important;* massacre at Schenectady. Queene Anne's War, 1702-1710, ending with uneasy peace of Utrecht, and resulting in France keeping the Mississippi valley; King George's War, 1744-48. (The fourth and last intercolonial war, French and Indian, 1754, I've covered in "The Bush Fighters.") I am keen to play up each one of these periods before I quit the game. They, together with the periods I have already covered, constitute our entire colonial history, broadly speaking.

I RECEIVE many letters from men who know a —— sight more than I'll ever know, declaring they've been to school again in my yarns and begin to realize what it, the dry-rot of their school-days, really means to us today. That's the great fault with our system of teaching history—they memorize some dates and are permitted to believe the series of wars and migratory movements comprise something that is all ended. And of course the influence of those first cabins in the Shenandoah valley will never end. They are not encouraged to realize how the boys of 1700-1810 *always* associated a "frontier" with the tomahawk and the torch; that those conditions were ingrained in the youngster's life as are electric lights and the movies in the life of today.

What a mess I'm writing! But when it comes to the fellers who did the rough work in the old days I'm a nut.—Pendexter.

Here is the list:

Some Books on Early Fur-Trade

Bryce. *Remarkable History of the Hudson Bay Company*;* Bonneville, Benj. L. E. (ed. by Washington Irving) *The Rocky Mountains*;* Bigelow. *Life of J. C. Frémont* (also Frémont's own Memoirs);* Chittenden, Hiram Martin. *American Fur Trade in the Far West*;* Chittenden. *Early Steamboat Navigation of Missouri River*;* Chittenden and Richardson. *Life, Letters and Travels of Father De Smet*;* Dodge, Gen. G. M. *Sketch of Jim Bridger*;* Dunbar, Seymour. *History of Travel in America*;* Ellis, G. E. *Hudson Bay Company*;* Henry, Alexander. His Journal, of fur trade (ed. by Elliott Coues);* Irving, Washington. *Astoria*;* Inman and Cody. "*The Old Salt Lake Trail*;"* Larpenteur, Charles. *Forty Years in the Fur Trade* (ed. by Coues);* Leonard, Zenas. *Narrative of Zenas Leonard*;* Laut, Agnes. *Story of the Trapper*;* Morice. *History of Northern British Columbia*;* McKenzie, Alexander. *Voyages From Montreal, etc.*;* McCarthy, J. *History of Our Own Times* (ch. 55, v. 4);* Peters, D. C. *Pioneer Days and Frontier Adventure* (Life of Kit Carson);* Ross, Alexander. *Fur Hunters of the Far West*;* Willson. *The Great Company.**

On the Early Santa Fé Trade

Gregg, Josiah. *Commerce of the Prairies*;* Inman. *The Old Santa Fé Trail.**

Some Books on Indians—[General]

Parkman. *Conspiracy of Pontiac*;* Parkman. *The Oregon Trail*;* Morgan, Lewis. *Houses and Houselife of American Aborigines*;* Schoolcraft. *Thirty Years with Indian Tribes*;* Manypenny, Geo. *Our Indian Wards*;* Dodge, Col. Richard I. *Our Wild Indians*;* Custer, Gen. Geo. A. *My Life on the Plains*;* Drake, Francis S. *Indian History for Young Folks*;* Gallatin, Albert *Synopsis of Indian Tribes*;* Jackson, Mrs. Helen Hunt. *A Century of Dishonor*;* Adair, James. *History of American Indians* (Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Carolinas, Virginia);* Charlevoix, Father. *Letters to Duchesse Lesdiguieres*, 1720-22;* Brooks, Elbridge S. *Story of the American Indian*;* Catlin, Geo. *Illustrations and Letters* (very pro-Indian);* Bancroft, Hubert Howe. *Native Races of the Pacific States* (5 vols.);* Larned's *History Ready Reference*, Vol. I, article, "American Aborigines."*

By Tribes and Regions

Bureau American Ethnology annual reports, such as:

First report: *Wyandot Government*, by J. W. Powell; *Mortuary Customs of North American Indians*, by H. C. Yarrow. Second report: *Myths of the Iroquois*, by Erminnie A. Smith; *Zuni Fetiches*, by F. H. Cushing. Sixth report: *Osage Traditions*, by J. Owen Dorsey. Ninth report: *Medicine Men of the Apache*, by John G. Bourke; Fourteenth report: *Ghost Dance Religion and Sioux Outbreak of* 1890, by James Mooney. Fifteenth report: *The Siouan Indians*, by W. J. McGee (a preliminary sketch). Seventeenth report: *Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians*, by Mooney. Nineteenth report: *Myths of the Cherokee*, by Mooney.* Beauchamp, W. M. *The Iroquois Trail* (including Cusick's sketches of ancient history of the Six Nations);* Beckworth, James P. (Chief of Crows). *Life and Adventures of*;* Stone, William L. *Life of Red Jacket—Life of Joseph Brant*;* Morgan, Lewis H. *League of the Iroquois*;* Riggs, Rev. Dr. Stephen R. *Forty Years With the Sioux*;* Grinnell, Geo. Bird. *The Fighting Cheyennes—Pawnee Hero Stories—Blackfoot Lodge Tales*;* Carrington. *Ab-sa-Ra-Ka Home of the Crows*;* Copway, Geo. (Kah-Ge-Ga-Bowh). *History of Ojibway Nation*;* Clarke, Peter D. *History of the Wyandots*;* Garrard, Lewis H. *Wah-to-yah*, and *The Taos Trail*;* Benson, Henry C. *Life Among the Choctaw Indians*;* Lee, Nelson. *Three Years Among the Comanches*;* Blackbird, Andrew J. (Mack-aw-De-Nessy). *History of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*;* Hurt, Dr. Garland. *Indians of Utah*;* Miller, Joaquin. *Unwritten History—Life Among the Modocs*;* Lewis and Clarke, 1893 edition, edited by Dr. Coues;* Cortez, José. *History of Apache Nation* (Pacific Ry. reports, Vol. III);* Eastman, Charles. *Indian Boyhood*;* Dorsey, G. A. *Arikara Traditions* (pub. 1903 by Carnegie Institution);* Dorsey and Kroeber. *Traditions of the Arapaho* (pub. 1903 Field Columb. Mus.).

And here is a letter that followed:

Norway, Maine.

Dear Hoffman: Concerning the bibliography: You can have as long a list as you care for. What I submitted will hold the beginner for some time. The man who is already delving into the subject will have had an opportunity to add to his own lists by noting the authorities cited. I had thought to submit later a list dealing with our development from 1700 to 1800, leaving out Revolutionary War histories and stressing various border chronicles, annals, etc., showing the every-day life of the people at different periods, what they were up against and how their homely tribulations spurred them on to cross mountains, make homes and unwittingly supply the conditional cause for some epoch. If you'd go for to admire to have more, say so. And I'll mark them "add." I have carbons of what I sent in. If you care for the Colonial data, suggested above, say as much, and I'll shoot some in. The searcher after beginnings of things will shortly be struck by the similarity of thought and event expressed by various writers of later years. Then he'll begin to understand they all harked back to some common source, or sources, If he had known that in the first instance and could have made the jump himself, he'd have saved himself lots of repeating in his reading and discern where certain modern authors drank at the wrong spring and are exploiting entirely wrong ideas.—PENDEXTER.

I've an idea many of you'd welcome the other list covering 1700 to 1800 and I'm going to ask Mr. Pendexter for it. It's a pity that dry school methods have spoiled for a good many of us the history of our own country, but Hugh Pendexter's tales have made us realize afresh what a wonderful and thrilling story that history really is, and it's just as well to know where to turn for further chapters.

A WORD from Farnham Bishop in connection with his story in this issue:

Berkeley, California.

The cow-trick was worked by a detachment of "flotilla men" from the gunboats stationed at Sandy Hook. By means of this stratagem they captured the *Eagle*, tender to the *Poictiers*, 74. The improvised bombs are not a Yankee but a British device, being the invention of the famous Liverpool slaver Captain Hugh Crow, who never had a chance to use them in any of his numerous fights.—FARNHAM BISHOP.

HOW do you like the new plan we're trying in this issue on the contents-page? I mean the little lines describing each story. What we're trying to do in those lines is to give you information, so that you can run through the contents at a glance, and have a general idea of what each story is about. Not enough to spoil your enjoyment of it when you read it by telling its plot or outcome in advance. That is, we want to give you acceptable information instead of using the space to ballyhoo the story and tell you how good it is. The stories ought to do their own ballyhooing; if they don't, we'd rather not do it for them. We haven't been running to ballyhoo very much on the contents-page, but now we're cutting out even the whispers.

How do you like the idea? Are we telling you enough about the stories? Would you rather not be told anything at all? Do you *like* the ballyhoo—do you like to have your interest stimulated by more or less dramatic words after their titles on the contents-page? Any other suggestion?

OF COURSE what we want is to make the contents-page the kind you like best. If you don't like this new method, we'll try to make the page what you do like. As for us here in the office, we're not strong on ballyhoo anywhere in the magazine—not strong on shouting about how good our wares are. But it's the general custom of magazines to do so. We'd rather just hand you the stories, trying to make 'em good enough to win out on their own merits, but does that make our magazine look flat and dull in comparison with magazines bristling with good selling-talk about their stories? Does it keep new readers from joining us?

That last question, of course, has nothing to do with what you old readers like, but is solely a business matter, a matter of increasing our sales. I don't hesitate to put it up to you, however, for I learned long ago that our readers are good enough friends to consider the magazine's progress and financial welfare as well as their own likes and dislikes, and I know I'll get some sound, disinterested advice on this point.

How about ballyhoo in "Trail Ahead" and in the ad. at the end of contents-page, telling what's in the next number? Here the case is a bit different, since the stories can't be present to speak for themselves.

THOSE lines characterizing the stories or advertising them are technically known as "blurbs" and gosh-all-hemlock how all of us hate writing them! After a man has written the blurbs for a dozen or two issues both his brain and his stomach go back on him, so we shift the job around every little while. A new member of the staff always has this gold-brick handed to him as soon as possible—he gets to see his work in print and we get a rest.

GENERALLY, even yet, whenever I hear the word "blurb" I'm likely to think of Sinclair Lewis. As I remember it, we didn't begin using blurbs until he'd left the staff, but somehow the word or the word "dingbat" (meaning such little ornaments as we scatter through the text itself to mark a shift in scene or time) nearly always recalls him. We keep cut-out proof of all our dingbats in a huge tray divided into little compartments, ready for pasting on page-proofs to indicate to the printer which one is to be used at a given place. A terrible job to load that big tray and keep the little pieces of paper with dingbats on 'em from getting mixed. One day, Lewis, who used to move around with about the same lack of velocity as a bullet leaving a gun, wrecked the whole blamed tray, leaving it upside down on the floor with the thousands of dingbats hopelessly mixed under and around it.

As you know, he can express himself with fulness and exactness, but this time he couldn't—just lay back in his chair with his long body straightened out and his legs stretched out, looking at me and presently working his lips silently. Couldn't get under way in the self-expression line, but presently the fact that I was laughing instead of shedding tears got to him and he recovered sufficiently to tell me about things—the dingbats, the tray, the desk, the chair, me, himself. He isn't red-headed for nothing. I know why "Main Street" is a success, for he meant that book too, and said in it what he felt, only more chastely.

YOU newer readers didn't know Sinclair Lewis used to be on our magazine? Yep, but that's some time ago. After Turnbull White went to *Everybody's* and I stepped up into his shoes, George Olds took my place, Lewis followed him, then Noyes, an old college mate of Lewis', then Harry Wade, then Noyes again, with others gradually being added as the work grew. And here I sit through it all, eleven years older than when our magazine was born but not minding being here a bit. Sort of like it.

As to the new kind of blurb on our contents-page, let me know your likes and dislikes on the subject.

SORRY Comrade Coleman didn't go ahead and give us the story:

Philadelphia, Pa.

Would be pleased to hear through the Camp-Fire of one Tracy, outlaw. Where his usual stamping grounds were, or in fact, anything regarding him. Other than his last name, I don't know, except that he would not be captured alive and died by his own last bullet after holding off and reducing the number of his pursuers. A story of Tracy was told me by a chance acquaintance who seemed to have been in the region in which Tracy operated. Was he a real person? Or a myth for the benefit of an Eastern "dub."—J. J. COLEMAN.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine, John McLoughlin Harvey follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

Mirabel Mine, Via Calistoga, California.

First of all, I wish to say that I am flattered by the invitation to become a member of the "*Adventure* family" and to join the circle of readers and writers gathered about the Camp-Fire.

I AM thirty-six. Civil engineering work, mining and prospecting have claimed most of my time. California is my home, but my work and my love of prospecting have often carried me far afield.

Looking back, many of my years appear as an endless succession of camps and camp-fires. I sometimes think I would rather prospect than eat! Hopefulness and patience play a large part in the equipment of a prospector and luckily I seem to be inexhaustibly endowed with both. I can remember, years ago, an old-timer warning me: "You're so plumb full o' hope, some o' these days you'll blow up an' bust!" Since that prediction I've followed the gold-seekers' trails through thousands of miles of Western deserts and mountains, and nothing more serious than my bank-account has so far "busted" on any of these pleasurable occasions. So you see Old-Timer wasn't infallible. My "big strike" still lies in the future, but I always feel reasonably certain it's just beyond the next range of hills.

OF LATE years, a bit weary of wandering, I have been home-hunting, and last Winter I homesteaded in the "home valley" of my boyhood days—Loconoma, a beautiful little valley nestling at the foot of Mt. St. Helena, in the Coast Range of California.

An old road, now dim and seldom-used, winds across my homestead, passing within a few steps of my tent door. The sight of it, as I glanced out through the open flaps a moment ago, recalled to mind an incident I think I'll have to tell to the Camp-Fire circle. One hot Summer day many years ago a string of pack-laden burros came plodding along that road. Behind them limped two very young and very weary prospectors. Boys, animals and outfit showed plainly the wear and tear of two thousand miles of Nevada desert trails, with a five-hundred-mile home trail added. Months earlier, here in this same valley, these two young hopefuls had bragged "high, wide and handsome" to all who would listen. "We'll hit her this trip!" "Wait 'till you see us come home in our automobiles!" "Watch our smoke!"—was the burden of their song.

This footsore and inglorious progress along the dusty road was that boasted return. As they crossed the little flat where my tent now stands, both were wishing they hadn't been so cock-sure and top-lofty. Their pockets were empty. So were the grub-boxes on the "jacks." So were the boys' stomachs! Did they herald their homecoming with a cheerful clamor? They did not! They let their respective families do all the clamoring, supply all the excited greetings and do all the talking. The sight of that old road seldom fails to remind me of the sheepish feelings of those two youthful blow-hards upon that momentous occasion. I know about it—you see, I happened to be one of them.

The scene of the story is the Cascade Range of Washington, near the Canadian boundary. The actual scene of the events is an imaginary one, except that I had the Skagit River in mind when I referred to the "White Water." The "Shoulder" and "Thunder River" do not exist, although there are really several great cañons merging with that of the upper Skagit which topographically correspond to my imaginary "Thunder River," and there are existing mining districts in that region also.—John McLoughlin Harvey.

THE mail that comes in to my desk is interesting in many ways. For example, here are the places one day's letters came from: West Virginia; New York State; California; Nice, France; Minnesota; Connecticut; London; South Dakota; Philadelphia; Long Island; Ashanti, West Africa; California; Honduras; New York; Oklahoma; England; Maryland; Guatemala; Arizona; California; Florida; South Carolina; Honduras; Pennsylvania.

Among those who wrote these letters were three writers, a minister, a life convict, a mining engineer, an editor, a soldier, a British District Commissioner, an old-timer of the West, a wealthy reformer, a physician. The others could not be definitely identified as to business or profession from their letters.

It shows pretty plainly what different types gather around our Camp-Fire in good fellowship.

SOMETHING from E. E. Harriman of "A. A." and our writers' brigade about an old buffalo gun:

> As I write an old gun hangs above my *maquina*. It is a brave old gun, a gun that helped make history and the West. It is a .45-110 Sharps buffalo gun, now my own.
>
> IN THE old days before Wyoming had been formed; while it was still a part of the nebulous territory known as Dakota, this gun did its part in making bad men of various colors over into good men of the established Western brand.
>
> It has a record of more than one thousand deer, more antelope than deer, seven or eight hundred buffalo, a good many silvertips and a very fair proportion of hostile Indians. Its advent into Chloride, Arizona, during the war, was the signal for a hurried exodus of the anarchistic group which had tried to burn the town.
>
> THIS gun and another exactly like it once slew that giant of all buffalo in Wyoming. Its owner, then a young man, and a friend, had run out of meat. They started to get some. A long tramp and in the distance they saw a lone buffalo bull, driven out of the herd. He stood stock still, facing a hill.
>
> At two hundred yards the other man fired. The bull switched his tail, hunching his back slightly, but never moved a leg. The man who gave me this gun fired. Again the little tail switched madly. Seven times apiece the big guns boomed before the bull fell.
>
> "I stood five feet eight and a half and I had to stretch up as high as possible to look level across the side of the bull into the eyes of my friend," said the owner of this gun. "I skinned the front of his skull and the hide was two inches thick. The hair on it was fourteen inches long. I took a section of hide off a flank, where it is always thinnest, and it was a quarter of an inch thick. I claim we killed the biggest buffalo in the world. Never have I seen an animal as large as this bull, excepting an elephant.
>
> "We found fourteen bullet-holes in his side. We had neither of us missed a single shot. Not one bullet had passed clear through, but all fourteen were lodged between the ribs and skin on the far side of the bull. And the fourteen holes were inside a ten-inch circle, though only the last one touched the heart."
>
> THAT is what the old man told me in my own home last month and I know him to be a truthful man. I do not doubt his story in any particular. His regret is great that it was not possible to save hide and skeleton and have them set up for the people of today to look at. But that was impossible then.
>
> But think of the dead bull, lying on his side and bulking as high as the eyes of a man five feet eight inches tall. He had feet more than three times as large as the average buffalo bull's.
>
> "There were giants in those days," says the chronicler and it was true of many mammals beside man.
>
> Then the old man went back to Chloride and sent the rifle to me, as a gift. Only an old-timer can know how much I think of it—and the giver.—E. E. Harriman.

HENRY OYEN died October 23. It was a matter of only a few hours, death being caused by the bursting of a blood-vessel in his brain. Among our older readers the author of "The Snow Burner" and "Gaston Olaf" won a high and permanent place. During recent years he added to his laurels by his work when writing exclusively for the *Country Gentleman*, both fact and fiction. His book, "Big Flat," was one into which he very particularly put his heart, a story of the land on which he had grown to manhood. The future was large before him. At our Camp-Fire he was a good comrade, simple, direct, sincere, keen, fearless, as he was in all his living. I was among those fortunate enough to have him for a friend, a friend in the best sense of the word. He was one of the realest men I have ever known.

I know that Camp-Fire rises to its feet to wish him God-speed over the Long Trail.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure,* New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid,* the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: Nov., Dec., 1910. Jan., Feb., April, May, June, Sept., Oct., 1911. May, Oct., Dec., 1912. Feb., Dec., 1913. Jan., June, Sept., Dec., 1914. March, May, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., 1915. Feb., April, July, Oct., 1916. Jan., Mid-Sept., First Oct., Mid-Oct., Mid-Nov., Mid-Dec., 1917. First Jan., Mid-Jan., First Feb., Mid-Feb., First March, Mid-March, First April, Mid-April, Mid-May, Mid-June, Mid-Sept., First Oct., Mid-Oct., First Nov., Mid-Nov., First Dec., Mid-Dec., 1918. All 1919, 1920, 1921 to date. In good condition. Twenty cents each, or best offer for lot.—Address ALFRED BORCHERS, Garabance Lane, Albany, N. Y., care of Schellar.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bear the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making in itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelop is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
Beriah Brown, 1624 Bigelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2
Captain A. E. Dingle, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
Captain A. E. Dingle, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. ★ New Zealand; and South Sea Islands Part 1
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
Charles Brown, Jr., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
Albert Goldie, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
Fay-Cooper Cole, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
Dr. Albert Buell Lewis, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
Buck Connor, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 103 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
Captain Beverley Giddings, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Russia and Eastern Siberia
Major A. M. Lochwitzky (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), care *Adventure*. Petrograd and its province; Finland, northern Caucasus, Primorsk district, island of Sakhalien. Travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

14. Africa Part 1
Thomas S. Miller, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

15. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan,

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached*)

Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

16. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, care of Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

17. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

18. Africa Part 5 Morocco
George E. Holt, Frederick, Md. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

19. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
Captain Beverley Giddings, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

20. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

21. Turkey and Asia Minor
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

22. Balkans
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Albania, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, language, customs, trade opportunities.

23. South America. Part 1
Edgar Young, care *Adventure.* Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

24. South America Part 2
P. H. Goldsmith, *Inter-American Magazine,* 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Central America
Edgar Young, care *Adventure.* Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

26. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 West 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexio—Sonora , Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

27. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

28. ✠ Canada Part 1
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

29. ✠ Canada Part 2
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

30. ✠ Canada Part 3
George L. Catton, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

31. Canada Part 4
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

32. Canada Part 5
Ed. L. Carson, La Connor, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

33. ✠ Canada Part 6
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

34. ✠ Canada Part 7
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

35. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

36. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

37. Western U. S. Part 2
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

38. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure.* The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially early history of Missouri Valley.

39. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
John B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

40. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

41. Eastern U. S. Part 1
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

42. Eastern U. S. Part 2
Howard A. Shannon, *Alexandria Gazette,* Alexandria, Va.—Motor-boat and canoe cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and tributary rivers. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water-fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

43. Eastern U. S. Part 3
Hapsburg Liebe, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

44. Eastern U. S. Part 4
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheellock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)
✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

Robert Frothingham, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out of doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day: chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation-hands, etc.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. Arthur Bent, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

Bermuda

ONCE again I ask it on behalf of all the "Ask Adventure" experts: Will those who make use of this service address their questions to the right parties, and obey the simple rules? If they don't, they may not get any answer. The "Ask Adventure" man is a patient soul—too patient, I think—but he knows his rights and every once in a while he stands up for 'em. As thus:

Question:—"I would like to get your expert advice on a matter of settling on some British territory. I am a British subject and Canadian war veteran. I have two thousand dollars, and would like some advice on Vancouver Island or the Bermudas. I don't expect riches, but enough to make a good living and something for my old days.

I am forty years old, strong and healthy and a good worker, and not afraid of hard work. I would be willing to work for others until I got on my feet.

Have two sons whom I could get to come to help me when I got things started or would come to me any time I would want them. They are good hardy boys, sober and honest, and are good workers. So please let me know if Vancouver Island or the Bermudas would be the best place for me for a small farm with my little capital; or could a fellow settle on Vancouver Island above some large town? Would be willing to settle up-country where a fellow could get his produce down a river to the town. Please post me on the climate and the crops and what would be the best to raise there; or would the Bermudas be better?

So please let me know if a fellow could do a little prospecting on the side to any profit in Vancouver Island. I will be waiting your answer through the *Adventure* magazine."—John Griffin, Holyoke, Mass.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—First let me say that *Adventure* only prints an occasional letter as a sort of sample; every reply is sent direct, as this is, to the inquirer; that is why we ask for a self-addressed envelop, fully prepaid, or stamp enclosed. (See *Adventure*.)

About Vancouver; I do not handle that territory. Mr. Ed. L. Carson, La Connor, Washington, handles the territory nearest to Vancouver, and I believe he can tell you about it. Look up your *Adventure* magazine and get the right departments. It'll save you time.

About Bermuda; I don't know of any farming-ground to let. You see, this place is less than twenty square miles in area, and all of it is rock, most of it with less than six inches of soil on top, and all the available ground was taken years ago. Bermuda potatoes last year fetched around $28 a barrel in New York, and onions around 17 cents a pound here in Bermuda, so you see how much chance there is for a man to snap up land out of the tiny pieces we have.

I do think, however, that if you and your sons cared to come down here and work for somebody at first, you would soon get landed, and I know of several very good men here who would welcome such help, with or without capital, and make it comfortable for you if they could feel assured that you would give ample notice before quitting, and not sheer off just about crop-time. Let me know if you get no satisfaction from Vancouver, and want to consider this proposition. I can then put you into communication with one or two good men in Bermuda.

The Hod-Carrier Wins

MR. HARRIMAN says he knocks out more money than a prospector. More than some college professors, I'll say:

Question:—"Have been thinking strongly of going to Nevada or Idaho, and would like to know which of these States, if either, a young man who can stand a rough, hard life could do better in as a prospector and adventurer.

Are there any more chances for a mineral claim being staked in either of these States, or is all the land that is worth anything in the way of minerals claimed by private owners or concerns?

Are there any chances of making anything at hunting and trapping?

I would also like a little information as to what a complete outdoor outfit would consist of, and would you also state what caliber rifle would be best to use in this country.

Please do not publish either my name, initials or address."— —— ——.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Nevada is a desert State, remember. It has millions of acres of open land, not worth what it costs to survey it. When somebody is lucky and finds mineral on it, it becomes valuable. Anybody has the right to hunt for mineral, and hundreds do it for every one that finds it. Right now the Silverhorn, near Pioche, is exciting attention. Big values in silver have been located there recently.

Prospecting is a hard life and a mighty unprofitable one, on the average. Men are still combing such places who have been at it thirty years or more without making a stake yet. Your chances of striking it rich are about one in a million. Men who know the game starve at it. You can do better as a hod-carrier.

Last week I went up Mazuka Cañon, Inyo County, this State. I saw how a prospector lives. Pigs in the average state have more comforts and less discomfort.

Idaho has mineral in the mountains, but both States have been gone over thousands of times by experienced men. Keep out of it.

With stringent game laws, short seasons, small bags allowed and a law against selling game in markets, I fail to see how one can make any money hunting. Trappers have quit the game because raw furs are so far below last year's prices, according to E. W. Biggs of K. C., Missouri, fur-buyer.

I enclose printed list for camping outfit.

For prospecting one needs a few additional articles. Write to California State Mining Bureau, Ferry Building, San Francisco, and ask for Bulletin No. 87. It gives a list of books, list of minerals found in this State, which is nearly the same as in others of the West, field tests for various minerals, etc.

Any rifle more powerful than a .22 rim fire will do for most of the game. If you butt into a bear who is sour-tempered you had better have at least a .30-30.

New Zealand 'Possum

MR. MILLS wrote his reply to this query on August 22, so you can figure out just when the open season closes—or do you say "when the closed season opens" in New Zealand?

Question:—"I am taking the liberty of asking you the following questions with regard to 'possum-trapping in New Zealand. After a season's trapping and shooting my friend and I intend proceeding to South Africa. Here are the questions:

Is there a Government royalty?

How could we obtain trapping grounds? And what part of New Zealand would be the best?

When does the meat season commence?

Also could you please tell us whether a Camp-Fire Station has been started in New Zealand yet? If there is not one I think some of us could work together and endeavor to form one if possible; for although New Zealand is not altogether big and thickly populated there are, I am sure, a considerable number of *Adventure* readers here."—G. F. Birkett, Wangaehu, Masterton, N. Z.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—You and your mate will have to wait quite a long while to get at the opossum, for the season has just closed. It is essentially a Winter game, as the little animal is valuable for its fur. No permit is required for trapping either over here or in Australia, where the little fellow has become a pest, and both countries are glad to get rid of it, as it is a destructive agent.

The opossum is a simple child of nature, and therefore easily trapped. He, she and it come down the tree at daybreak, and stick their respective heads into a noose hung upon an artificial branch fixed at an angle from the hole in the tree. Shooting would spoil the skin and fur.

In the Paekakariki area, between Wellington and Otaki, is the best ground for the opossum in New Zealand. There are many grounds in Australia, especially in New South Wales. The next season will be in June or July, and it starts later in Australia, as the trappers wait for the thickening of the fur.

Yes, there are a goodly number of *Adventure* readers in New Zealand, but they are scattered so widely and thinly that I do not see how we could get enough together to build up a Camp-Fire over here. How many "71" buttons have you come across in your travels? I have seen only one so far, though I have had several callers at the office who are *Adventure* fans. Good luck to you and them.

The Rapier Mart

THE gentleman's weapon still has its admirers:

Question:—"Could you inform me as to where I could obtain or any company handling the French and Spanish rapiers and dueling-swords?"—Wm. E. Harding, Canton, O.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—I assume from your letter that what you desire to find are real French or Spanish rapiers, not fencing foils for use. My advice would be to send to Francis Bannerman's Sons, 591 Broadway, N. Y. City, for their catalog. (General in nature of weapons and appurtenances). As it contains 400 pages, and is almost an illustrated history of all weapons in itself, they ask fifty cents for it, which I presume you must send with order. They are the largest dealers in arms in the world, and you should find what you wish.

If you wish to find wonderfully rare and expensive original swords, running into the hundreds in price, the finest I have ever seen in this country (and I have no doubt the finest there are) may be found at Mr. Sumner Healy's, Madison Ave. near 64th St. You may mention my name as having suggested him if you desire. I do not know him well, but have purchased there and found him a courteous gentleman and fair dealer. I doubt if he has catalogs or lists, but doubtless he could tell you whether he has any particular kind of blade, and its cost.

Outdoor Jobs in Canada

IS FIFTY degrees below zero any inducement?

Question:—"I am writing to see if I can get some information about the part of Canada that you cover.

I am seventeen years old and am thinking of going somewhere in the 'Great Northwest' for my health and to build myself up.

So please write and tell me something about your territory.

I have graduated from high school, but have been broken down in health. The doctor advised me to 'rough it' out in the woods for a couple of months. Hence this letter.

Do you think that I could get a job somewhere in your territory, so that I could get some exercise out in the open air? For instance, in a lumber camp? I have no experience in woodcraft and have no trade. What is the average temperature up there?"—B. B. LUDLOW, Key West, Florida.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—At the present time there is a great deal of unemployment in Canada. and I think you would be unwise to come to these parts unless you have something in the way of a position definitely in view.

The climate is healthy, but extremely cold, the temperature frequently going as low as fifty degrees below zero.

By writing to the Department of the Interior, Ottawa, you could secure pamphlets dealing with northern Canada and setting forth opportunities, etc.

There is usually plenty of work in the lumber camps in the Winter, but the men are a pretty tough bunch, and the work is very hard for an inexperienced man.

During the harvesting season there is no difficulty in securing work on the farms, and that also is hard, but healthy.

There is a great deal of prospecting for minerals taking place in The Pas district, northern Manitoba, and this is a good life, and not particularly strenuous, but the cost of outfitting for an expedition would amount to in the vicinity of $1,000.

You might write to the employment office, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, for particulars of any vacancies they may have in lumber camps or other industries.

Bee Caves

FIFTEEN acres of them, dripping with good honey that the natives don't want. They tell it in Texas:

Question:—"Can you tell me about prospecting for honey in Texas—where the honey is? What steps should be taken should a man desire to try to secure the honey? By what means of transportation would a man bring the honey out if it were possible to secure it?"—JULIUS WILLSON, Repusa, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—In Menard Co. there are several streams that flow through a mountainous country, and there are many bees in that section, as are also found in other parts of the State on rivers.

On the Colorado River about eighteen miles northwest of Austin there is a post-office that takes it name from the caves that are full of honey—Bee Caves. There are about fifteen acres of these caves, but the natives do not bother about trying to get the honey. The honey drips from the roof and the honeycombed rocks on warm days, which makes it very foolish to run the risk of getting stung to death for a few pounds of honey.

Most of the streams of Texas that flow through mountainous sections are well supplied with bees. Some of the best rivers are the Colorado, San Saba, Llano, San Marcos, Nueces, Pecos, and a large number of creeks in the southwestern part of the State. I mention a few of the rivers that I know have the name of having bees in abundance, and as the wild flowers grow in these sections very prolifically it is natural to suppose that there is plenty of honey to be found.

The bees use hollow trees, caves, deserted houses, and any other place that can be used for concealment that is near water.

On the streams that I have mentioned a person would have to use burros or horses to transport the honey as the depository in most cases would be quite a distance from roads—in a wild, unsettled section of the mountains.

Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

The Leper Island, Molokai

IT'S a nice life there—except for the leprosy:

Question:—"Please excuse me for not sending a stamped addressed envelope, for U. S. stamps are scarce here, and German stamps would not be of any value to you.

I have heard several rumors about the island where all people who have leprosy are quarantined. I do not know just where it is, or the name of it, but I believe it is in your district.

What I wish to know is, who does guard duty there? What is the pay? How long must one stay there? Are only six soldiers employed? How are living conditions there? Whom should I write to, to obtain employment there?

I am in the U. S. Army now, but expect to be discharged within a few months, and I would like to go there to do guard duty. I understand that one must do three years' duty and two years' quarantine, making five years in all."—PVT. CHARLES E. NAVE, A. P. O. 927, Coblenz, Germany.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—I have been trying to trace down the matter of employment of guards on the leper island of Molokai in the Hawaiian Islands. I have had letters from service men all over the world asking the qualifications that are necessary to obtain employment on this island.

As a matter of fact there are no guards on the island of Molokai. The lepers live there, a little community all by themselves without any desire to go beyond the confines of the island. They are very happy and comfortable and do not suffer any pain. They have their schools, motion-picture theaters and every other convenience that you would find in any other small community.

Buying Old Army Rifles

YOU can get a good game gun cheap this way, if you buy well in the first place and have the arm slightly altered:

Question:—"The N. R. A. has the following rifles and carbines, all presumably in serviceable condition; which one would you advise me to select for a 'big-game' rifle? Give me your first and second choice. Would you advise the selection of a carbine or rifle? What rifle would you select in preference to these I am about to name? I do not wish to purchase a poor or unreliable game rifle because it is cheap; keep this in mind always.

I say 'big game' to give you a general idea of the type of rifle I desire, but just what big game or under what conditions I intend to use the arm I do not know as yet. The game not to be larger than found on the North American continent.

Do you think all or any of these rifles could be depended upon or made dependable by a gunsmith? I would not consider any of them otherwise. I think it was Major Whelen, the Army authority upon firearms, that said he converted a Krag rifle into a very fine big-game gun.

The rifles are:

Springfield rifle, caliber .45. Said to be in fair shape.
Springfield carbine, caliber .45.
Ross rifle, caliber .303. Not in good condition.
U. S. rifle, caliber .30, model of 1898 (Krag).
U. S. carbine, caliber .30, model of 1898. (Krag). Some of these in particularly good shape.
Russian rifle, caliber .762 m.m. New.

If I remember correctly, in one of your articles you say the rifles are the "cream of the outfit." How are these to select from? Name those not listed here that you think are the best."—Samuel Donelson, Jr., Washington, D. C.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—Allow me to recommend the purchase of a carbine, .30 caliber Krag. I ordered and received ten of these guns for ten members of the N. E. A. last Fall, and every fellow was more than pleased with the rifle he secured. The worst of the ten shot better than I could hold, and I am trying to secure it now by a trade.

Second choice would be the Krag rifle, caliber .30, to be remodeled. I worked one over in the following manner:

Cut barrel to twenty-five inches, beveled the muzzle and set Springfield front-sight block on it, cut off forestock just ahead of lower bend, and plugged hole left by the operation with bit of discarded fore end. Fitted receiver sight, and dovetailed pistol grip into the small of the stock, and topped same off with silver plate, made from Canuck half-dollar. Flattened out the toe of butt and filled with walnut, after enlarging the cavity in the butt to accomodate pull-through and oiler, as well as two extra shells. The rifle shoots and handles beautifully.

I would use the carbine as issued, but would have receiver sight and pistol grip dovetailed in.

The Springfield also makes a fine game rifle, but I like a lever or slide action, which brings in the Remington 14A and the Savage. All are good rifles; merely a matter of taste.

Wouldn't waste time or money on the old .45 rifles, the Ross, nor the Russian rifles. Krags or Springfields for me.

Surf-Fishing

DO IT this way and bring home the fish:

Question:—"Kindly inform me as to the following questions:

What fishing-tackle is required for surf-fishing?
How is surf-fishing done?
What kind of bait is used in surf-fishing?
How is bait-casting done?
How is sinker fastened to the line when bait-casting?

2. What shall a camping outfit contain when going light (hiking)?

Please do not put my name in print."— ——, Ponlabo, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—The tackle required for most kinds of surf-casting is a long rod with the reel above the handle. The reel is of large capacity, but nowadays there is coming a tendency to the short rod as in bait-casting. The line used is linen, as salt water will rot silk lines. A thumb-stall or drag is used on the reel to help drag the line as well as to prevent too free running of the spool while the bait is in flight.

The angler generally is in bip boots and wades right out in the surf, casting with either artificial or live bait. From the kind of fish you are fishing for alone can be decided the kind of live bait to be used or parts of fish cut up. Then there are spoon and block tin squids that are used as artificial.

Bait-casting is done with a short bait-rod with the reel above the handle, and the rods run to 8½ feet in length. The reel has a capacity of from 60 to 100 yards of braided silk line. All kinds of wooden minnows and spinners are used as well as live minnows and frogs.

The cast is made with the bait reeled in within 8 inches of the tip and a springy forward motion made just as when a boy you threw a little mud ball with a switch. Always thumb the line while the bait is moving to prevent backlashing. When the bait is about two feet above where you want it to land, stop it by firm pressure of the thumb. Either tie sinker just above bait or on the connecting link; if you use one snap it.

2. Pup tent, one blanket, towels, extra socks, shoes and underwear, soap and toilet articles and pocket mess-kit, and needles and thread.

What a Zambo Is

THEY'RE found in Nicaragua:

Question:—"The writer is interested in an expedition that may soon go into Nicaragua, and if you can do so I will be glad to have any information you can give me as to the health conditions, especially along the Rio Grande; the climate, the altitude, the nature of vegetation and other growth.

What animals are found there, and what is the nature of the native inhabitants? Is the country between the Babana and the Kurringoos Rivers from the mountains eastward timbered or prairie land, especially along the Rio Grande?

Can two or three men safely traverse the Rio Grande?

Are the negroes of African descent?"— ——— ——.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—1. The Rio Grande River for the first seventy-five to a hundred miles inland is sluggish and traverses a very low and tropical coastal plain, heavily wooded with strictly tropical jungle interspersed with open savannas or low grassy plains without trees, some of which are covered with a few inches of water and others of which are typical prairie lands. The climate of this part is humid and hot, feverish and unhealthy.

As the river rises into the mountains the country takes on more of a substantial appearance, and the forest is more of a temperate-zone affair. Rough hills are encountered, and in the extreme headwaters the country is very rugged. The climate gradually becomes less warm and less humid as the coast is left behind until at the very headwaters the climate is cool with scarcely more rain than we have here in this country.

2. The country between the Babana and the Curringwas or Kurringoos Rivers is of a similar nature with altitude the prevailing cause of change. On the lower ends of both rivers and in the country between, tropical jungle interspersed with savanna land will be found. On the higher reaches it is of about the appearance of our uncut temperate-zone forests, with the exception of the savanna lands, which are distinct and peculiar to the country.

The Pis-pis mines are near the source of the Babana. The Concepcion mines are between the sources of the Babana and Prinzapolca Rivers. The Wavawava mines are near the source of the Wavawava River. Before the war these mines were in the hands of Germans for the most part, and they were producing quite a quantity of gold.

The Prinzapolca is a very rough river on the upper reaches, and it is with the greatest difficulty that *pitpantes*, or dugouts, are poled and portaged up it. A few years ago the Indian wanted as much as seventy dollars a ton for transportation up this river. The Grande, however, is longer and there is much more water in it after once being across the bar at the mouth, and it does not head into such a high country as is reached by the Babana and Prinzapolca.

3. The negroes of this part are of African descent, being the descendants of runaway slaves from the West Indies, and also a mixture (zambo) of the negro and native Carib Indian. Many pure Caribs are still to be found in this part, also many pure negroes who do not speak a word of English.

It is safe enough for a party to make the trip up the Grande, and the principal thing to be feared is malaria along the lower part. See Encyclopedia Britannica for flora and fauna of this country. Also note list I am attaching.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

McNAMARA, WILLIAM or WILLIAM THOMAS. Private in 8th and 7th Cavalries during 1915—1916. Transferred to Motor Truck Train No. 16 latter part of 1916. Last heard of in some motor truck co. in France with the A. E. F. in 1917. Home in East Tenn. Any information will be appreciated.—Address C. L. TOSCH, M. M. Icl U. S. N. U SS C 299, San Diego, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

HAYS or HAYER, CONRAD. Last heard from about nineteen years ago as fleet was preparing to tour around world. Swedish, having come to U. S. at about the age of four years. Lived at Gray's Harbor, Washington until he was about seventeen or eighteen years old. Enlisted in Navy about 1902 or 1903. Had two sisters; one married a man named Fairchild and the other married a man named Fuller. He is now about thirty-six years of age. Relatives are very anxious to hear from him.—Address PVT. HUBERT W. FULLER, Medical Dept., Fort Sherman, C. Z., Panama.

KUSS, CORP. GEORGE A. Co. C. 117th Field Bn., Signal Corps. Last heard of in France May 1918 at A. P. O. 715. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate.—Address JERRY N. DWYER, Edson, So. Dak.

FRASER, JAMES OGILVIE. Sometimes known as James Crawford. Please communicate with W. R. TRULL, 545 Hood St., Portland, Oregon.

HAZELTON, V. J. Where are you? Send address through this magazine. Am all right.—ARTHUR THOMAS, care of *Adventure*.

McWILLIAMS, WALTER. Any one who knows him and can do a favor without expecting to be paid please write.—L. T. 436, care of *Adventure*.

KUBID, CHARLES. Last heard from in Constantinople, Minn., in 1909. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. ROSIE GOFF, Standing Stone, Pa.

HERBERT, N. A. (DELL). Last heard from in Chicago, Ill. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address J. R. PHILLIPS, 1018 Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.

WILMINGTON, REV. A. W. Last heard of in Weehawken or North Bergen, N. J. Please write.—Address A. T. RIETZ, Barracks No. 10, Ft. Porter, Buffalo, N. Y.

ARMSTRONG, SCOTT H. In San Domingo with U. S. Marines in 1917, 1918 and 1919. Write to your old buddy as soon as you see this. Letter to you care of *Adventure.*—Address HARRY T. HUDIE, care of E. E. Elliott, R. F. D. No. 3, Lynn, Ind.

FARWELL, FRANK J. or MACK. Chef. About forty-five years of age, six feet tall, 175 pounds, blue-gray eyes, black hair, heavy black eyebrows. Last heard from in Tulsa, Okla. Any information will be appreciated. —Address (Wife) MRS. F. J. FARWELL, 831 Byers Ave., Joplin, Mo.

JURY, W. E. Father. Last heard of in Montreal, Canada, 1917. Any information will be appreciated. —Address JOHN JURY, R. R. 1 care of S. Stephenson, Elk City, Okla.

NELSON, MRS. G. W. Maiden name Sally Ivy. Address five years ago was St. Cloud, Fla. Husband a sign-painter by trade. Any information as to whereabouts will be appreciated by her sister.—Address MRS. W. A. FOSSETT, Gen. Del. Tampa, Fla.

U. S. S. *LAKESIDE*, Ahoy. Would be glad to hear from all my old shipmates who served on this ship from June 1918 to February 1919. Also, Capt. Mooney, Lt. Hoffman, Ensigns Osborn, Green and Larrabee.—Address V. E. SCHMINKE, 501 Scott St., Baltimore, Md.

FRANK. Please write and let me know how much it will be. Sister.—ANNA J. WARD, Bastrop Co., Bastrop, Texas.

THE following have been inquired for in either the January 10th or January 20th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

APPEL, Milton or Moe; Boots, Jon T.; Brown, Fred A. and Mary; Clapp, Mrs. Nellie; Dural, Mrs. A.; Edwards, Thomas Herbert; Haertel, Art; Henderson, A. F.; Hines, Jack C.; Kaczynske, Gus; Kerr, Jack; Kutchinski, Gustave Adolph; Lipsey, Alex; Monk, Fred; O'Connor, Daniel; Olie, Pasquale; Rehmann, Mathias; Smeltzer, Bonnie, F.; Sond, Viola; Trowbridge, Frederick Cooke; White, Charles; Williams, Fitz; Williams, George C.; Wilson, Frank G.

MISCELLANEOUS—Shipmates of *S. S. Carlton* and *Farragut.*

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FEBRUARY 10TH ISSUE

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Tiger of the sea.

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He wouldn't guide 'em to the fish without his skillet-hound.

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Hyenas in African bush.

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